

The Peacock's Tail

by
Mrs. Romilly Fedden

A. P. Sent to R. R. L. 7/29/36

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THE PEACOCK'S TAIL

BY

MRS. ROMILLY FEDDEN

Author of "The Spare Room," "Shifting Sands," etc.

"The Earth is a Peacock;
Morocco is the tail of it."
MOORISH PROVERB



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

1925

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The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE • MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I

THE terrace of the hotel hung like a space of reality, of tangible material earth in a paradise of blue; blue sky above, blue sea below. To Leslie Stewart fresh from months of service in Flanders and weeks in hospital, the glory of the morning was almost overpowering. He crossed the brightly tiled floor to his table set for coffee close to the parapet. The hotel was empty. Morocco was inviolate from tourists during the war. He stood for a moment entranced, leaning on the flowered wall, looking over the flat roofs of the old town, over the white gleaming houses of the new European quarter, over the crescent of golden sand outlined by the silver thread of breaking surf, over the sapphire waters of the bay to the suave folds of the hills, lying in half-tones of mauve and grey and purple mystery.

He told himself that he was in luck to have this interlude. Heedless of the danger of his mission, he revelled in the present, in the sun and the colour of this nearest East.

As the slow-moving Arab waiter with stately

tread approached to place his coffee on the table, Leslie spoke, pointing across the straits to the coast of Spain.

'Tell me, waiter, that is Tarifa?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And the point on this side is the mountain, Jebel Moussa?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And these hills, what are they?'

'The Anjera Hills, yes, sir.'

'A good walk to those hills, eh?'

'Oh, no, sir. It is not safe on those hills. Very bad men.'

So those were the Anjera Hills, as he had supposed. He had never heard of them till five days ago. As he poured his coffee he reconstructed the little scene, the lunch with his uncle, old Lord Rathbone, at the club. It came back to him vividly, the grey damp of the London streets, the heavy warmth and comfort of the rooms, the uniforms, the gathering of the little group of guests and, then, the talk ranging from the battle-front, through the latest news, the latest scandal, the latest rumour of the latest invention to the latest German propaganda.

It was Lord Bolton, the new and sorely tried head of the Press Department, who had made them all sit up. He was one of these newcomers, Bolton,

a successful man of affairs, who spoke with the incisive manner of the board-room. 'It's a network,' he had said, 'which extends not only over Europe, the States, Canada, but over the Empire, over Africa, Asia, both the Americas. It is a system, an organisation whose headquarters are in Berlin, but whose ramifications reach to the smallest villages in the most remote countries.' He waved aside a dish; he was abstemious; bread and cheese he often announced were good enough for him. He leant forward, his clean-shaven, square, somewhat heavy face earnest.

'Where would you look now for their most vigorous work, work calculated to bring the best results?' He paused; no one answered. 'In India? Persia? Arabia? But it's nearer home than that. In Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco. If the Germans can only stir up trouble, get the Moors to raise the standard of a holy war, set the northern coast of Africa ablaze, they will have caused a diversion well worth while. France will be hard put to it. Her colonies are dear to her. To-day they are more than lightly held. The F.O. have news from our consul at El Foukara.' He paused, raising a warning hand, his voice impressive. 'And I tell you, it's touch and go over there.'

'But El Foukara,' Lord Rathbone objected, 'is in the Spanish zone.'

'Just so,' Bolton agreed, 'and the Spanish are neutral, but the Germans have money and Spain is always bankrupt. If the Germans could make a cat's-paw of the Spanish army to invade French Morocco and at the same time stir up the natives, the Riffs, to the south of the Spanish zone, and the wild tribesmen in the Anjera Hills to the north, they would themselves, without doubt, pull a few chestnuts out of the fire.'

'It's extraordinary,' Lord Rathbone had declared, 'how little the man in the street knows about that country. I confess that my own knowledge is very limited, and yet Morocco is at our doors. I happened to know the French commandant in Fez in 1912. He was shot during the massacres, poor fellow, as he entered the town at the head of the relief party.'

'Was there fighting there as late as that?' some one had asked, and Bolton had answered:

'As late as that! There is not a day now when fighting is not going on somewhere in the Spanish zone, between the Spaniards and the hillmen. Around El Foukara for example — Fitzgerald sends in his reports to the F.O., some of which I have seen — the Spanish casualties, within five miles of the town, are from one lieutenant to half a dozen men daily — daily. That's what they call *consolidating* their territory. Since El Foukara

was ceded to the Spanish in 1913, this guerilla warfare has gone on unceasingly. No European is safe five miles outside any town in the Spanish zone in Morocco. The Moors hate the Spanish with loathing. They are their hereditary enemies. Fitzgerald writes that he can watch the fighting a few miles out of town from the roof of the Consulate. One letter was graphic. He had seen the Spanish take a hill by assault, across the river from the town. But when they reached the summit, a body of natives rushed from a hut and hurled the Spanish soldiers off the precipice onto the rocks below.'

'Well, it's picturesque, to say the least,' Lord Rathbone had declared. 'It's real fighting, not scientific massacre, like our Western Front. A shred of glory still clings. My sympathy, I must say, is with the Moors. They gave Spain her culture, her gardens, her famous buildings, and they were driven forth from their Paradise by an army of robbers in the name of religion. They were driven out of Spain, across the straits, and now in the name of our modern God, progress, they are once more robbed, cheated, and driven from the seaboard to the hills.'

'Granted. Yet when all is said and done, you do not want to see the Moors prevail and the French lose Southern Morocco. That's what

Germany is after. Spain is jealous of the French who have put brains, intelligence, into the development of their zone. With German money Spain can make a deal of trouble.'

Leslie had smiled, the youngest at the table. 'And with a little English money the Moors could create a diversion that would trouble Spain.'

Lord Bolton had given him a keen look and had changed the subject. But later, over their coffee, the great man had beckoned him to his side.

'Are you the Stewart who did such good work in Persia? Well, no, you won't admit that damning fact — naturally. — But you were in Persia? Why did the F.O. let you transfer?'

Leslie laughed. 'My Guvnor's influence, I expect. Somerset is a long way from Persia, sir, and he naturally thought that I ought to be in the fighting.'

'You know that you ought not to have asked for that transfer. With your knowledge of the East and its problems — oh, I read your book — you were much more valuable to your country out there. I don't blame you. Quite the right spirit. Just out of hospital, aren't you? Fit again? You know Morocco?'

'As a tourist. I know Fitzgerald.'

'You speak Arabic?' Leslie grinned. 'Of course you do. Well, you may hear from me again. You

would not mind a little interlude in your service, I daresay, if at the same time you were doing some good.' And Bolton had shaken him by the hand and turned away.

That was how he happened to be here to-day, not back in France. Well, he'd make the most of it, enjoy each day to the full, enjoy the colour and the sun and the adventure, the danger — the exotic danger — before his way took him back across the winter seas to the cold and gloom of France. Thank the Gods for these few days. Allah be praised! His spirits mounted recklessly. How many men in these times had even one hour of such freedom! He jumped to his feet.

CHAPTER II

As Leslie turned from the table, there was a simultaneous greeting between himself and an elderly man who had just stepped onto the terrace.

‘Stewart!’

‘Rossiter! I was just going to find you at the Consulate.’

The older man was grave as their hands met. ‘I’ve only just had a wire through telling me to expect you.’

James Rossiter looked an Englishman of the best type, six feet and over, of massive frame, grey-haired, loose-jointed. He was by nationality an American, educated in England, who spoke English and wore his clothes like an Englishman. He had been American vice-consul in Morocco for more years than he cared to remember. Now, during the war, he was in charge of the British as well as the American interests at this port.

His kind blue eyes were curious. ‘What are you doing here? Isn’t Persia your beat?’

Leslie glanced about. ‘Are we safe?’

‘Couldn’t be safer, except in a balloon.’ Rossiter chuckled. ‘Look,’ he pointed over the parapet where the terrace, built on the side-hill, was

supported by concrete pillars thirty feet high, now festooned with blue convolvulus, and to its empty tiled surface forty feet behind them to the doors of the hotel.

'Here, then,' Stewart said. 'If that suits you?'

'Delighted.' They drew up chairs. 'Make it as public as possible if you want it to be sure and secret.'

Stewart took out his cigarette case. 'Will you smoke? The position is curious. If it won't bore you, I think I had better explain.'

'Please.' Rossiter was attentive, concentrated. 'I have had no instructions beyond the wire telling me of your coming.'

'When I last saw you,' Leslie began, 'I was in the Levantine Consular Service. I went home in '14 on leave — touch of fever — and once there I asked for a transfer to the Army. Couldn't stand it, you know. My brothers, all my friends, out. The family were all for it. Families are odd at times. I'd thought I'd been — well, not quite useless in Persia. But my father used his influence and the transfer was . . .'

'Not granted? They are not such fools?'

'Yes, granted.'

'Damn fools! Men who are trained to those outposts are needed more now than ever before.'

'So the F.O. said. But the Pater can wangle

anything. He doesn't understand, you see. Anyway, knowing what the men were up against in France, I wanted to be in it. So I was given a commission and had six months over there and then two in hospital. I was just out, ten days ago, when, at lunch with my uncle at his club, I met Bolton, the new head of the Press Department. The talk turned to German propaganda in Spanish Morocco.'

The older man nodded. 'That's true. Yes?'

'I made a silly remark which struck him, and the next day I was sent for from the F.O. I went. You know my old chief. He was looking as black as thunder. Said what he thought of my transfer in a few choice words and then asked if I would be willing to undertake a special mission where he thought I'd be of more use than in France. Of course I said I would. He and Bolton came to the point. Before them on the table were dispatches from Fitzgerald and from you. Yours said that all communication with the interior was interrupted, wires cut. That you'd heard nothing from Fitzgerald for a week. His, Fitzgerald's, sent off no one knows how, gave information of a plot, German money buying Spanish troops. He was powerless. He said that the Spanish troops were being steadily withdrawn from the garrisons at El Foukara, marching by night; only a handful

were left in the town. You can guess their destination. He said that he had tried to send a messenger through to you, but the man had not returned. He feared foul play.'

'By God! Go on, Stewart.'

'After laying the dispatches before me, they asked me to take this mission, to get through to Fitzgerald with instructions from the F.O., and with help of a more solid character from unofficial sources. So here I am, in mufti, neither flesh, fish, nor fowl, no longer of the Levantine Consular Service and suspended from the Army.'

'I see,' said Rossiter. 'We'll beat Germany at her own game.'

'With this money I hope that we can stir up sufficient trouble for the Spaniards in El Foukara to oblige them to retire from their designs upon French Morocco — if they wish to save themselves.'

Rossiter drew a deep breath. 'Go on.'

'The powers that be have confidence in Fitzgerald. You know him?'

'Every one in Morocco knows Fitzgerald, a wild Irishman, but a good fellow.'

'The best.'

'The natives call him "the Son of the King." You remember he is always swearing by his old 'uns who were kings in Ireland.'

Leslie smiled. 'In Athlone — I remember. Well, the F.O. give him a free hand to act as he thinks best, act through me, the unofficial agent. The *Firefly* put me ashore last night, after midnight. Now, what information can you give me? Did Fitzgerald's messenger ever get through to you?'

'I have had no communication of any kind from the interior for a fortnight. No messenger got through. But I think I can tell you what happened to him. Two weeks ago one of the protected Moors sent me a note which I could not understand. You know the stuff. It said that a casket of treasure destined for me was broken and the treasure stolen. I tried to get the man to explain, but he refused to see me. It was on that very day a headless man was found outside the gate. The authorities declared that they had no means of identifying the body. The body lay there for a day. I went out to have a look at the fellow myself. I have no doubts. That man was Fitzgerald's messenger.'

The two men sat for a moment in silence. Then Rossiter said slowly, 'I believe the man had been followed from El Foukara. I have no proof of any trouble here. The feeling seems to be pro-Ally. There may be German spies about, but I have no proof of it. This port is not big enough to tempt them. No, I do not think you need anticipate

trouble here. But there is no denying the fact that you are embarked on a risky business. The moment that you start overland you will be in danger.'

Leslie nodded.

'It is only forty miles — and your best way is by motor. There is no proper road, only a Ford track. You must make a dash for it. If you ride it will take you too long. With a Ford you might bang through in three hours.'

'How soon can I start?'

'That is the difficulty. Not before the morning. The boy who owns the only Ford told me yesterday that he was using his car for a picnic to-day. It's the only one in the place.'

Leslie shook his head. 'Then I think I must get a horse.'

'You could not go without an escort. That would take time. I should have to apply.'

'Are you sure that I couldn't, with luck, get through alone?'

'Chances are ten to one. The road leads through the Anjera country. The hill-tribes are all hostile. Mind you, not to the British, but they won't stop to question. The Spaniards have stirred up a hornet's nest and the hornets sting these days. The country was peaceful before the Spaniards came. I can remember when we rode

out there on picnics and sometimes camped for the night to get the early shooting and all the notice they took of us was to bring us food from the villages, chickens and eggs and *kouss-kouss*. Hatred for the Spaniards has set their hand against every man. No, your only chance is a motor. Travel as an American, a neutral, on business. I'll fix you up a passport. You can be selling something, knives or sewing-machines. I've got a sample one at the Consulate. The Moorish women all use sewing-machines. It's plausible. The boy who drives you speaks Arabic; of course, so do you. They probably wouldn't attack without stopping you. The machine explains. Anyway, it's your best chance.'

'But won't they know here at the hotel that something's up? If I arrive by gunboat at midnight and start by motor the next day?'

'Have you registered?'

'No, porter too sleepy.'

'You needn't. I will explain to the proprietor as we go in. Tell him that you are one of these mad Americans whose only thought is making money and that you got the destroyer to put you ashore from Gib. That you are here taking an option on land and that you're a friend of mine and I'm taking you off to the Consulate. You'll spend the night with me and you'll start early in

the morning and be on your way before tongues can wag.'

'Well,' Leslie said, as they strolled across the terrace together. 'A Riff bullet is more merciful than a German and I do get a run for my money. And, hang it all, Rossiter, I've got a whole day to myself and I'm going to make the most of it!'

'That's right. Send your luggage to the Consulate and turn up when you like, lunch . . .'

'Don't count on me for lunch.'

'Well, dinner.' As they stepped into the empty hall of the hotel Rossiter raised his voice. 'As you are interested in land, you'll want to take a walk around. It's safe within the five miles' limit. You can go as far as the olive grove.'

'A guide, sir?' A slight, insinuating figure stepped forward from behind a column. 'I am a very good guide, sir. Mr. Rossiter knows me. The olive grove, sir?'

Rossiter did not answer the man directly. 'You won't need any guide,' he said, and went to the office to interview the proprietor.

The guide followed Leslie to the foot of the stairs. 'I been guide to English gentlem, to English milor . . .'

'All right. But I am not English. I am American. And I don't want a guide.'

CHAPTER III

HALF an hour later Leslie, after seeing his bag off to the Consulate, passed through the hall and stepped into the native street at the back of the hotel. Ah, the scents! Incense, sweet gums and sandalwood, frying-oil, orange-flowers, coffee, drains, and offal; acrid, pungent, the smells of the East, of this unknown Moorish city. His impatience at the delay in his plans yielded to the old glamour of the East which whispers to the Westerner that he is on the verge of adventure — more often than not, he is!

He stood for a moment irresolute. That is fatal in the East. Out from the arch, which led on the right into a little square, came the guide.

‘I show you the way to the Soko, sir. This way to the Soko!’

Leslie turned abruptly in the other direction, an Arabic word on the tip of his tongue. That would have been a mistake, for the ordinary traveller knows no Arabic. They all echo the same phrases, ‘I wish I knew Arabic. You never understand a country till you know the language.’ The silly fools, who would never give the time to learn! He had worked for years and only now he knew . . .

His foot struck a stone. He looked down. A dirty town, dead fishes' heads. A town where the West showed its seamy side to the bewildered East, an international disgrace, as he had often heard.

Oh, for the real East! A wave of longing swept over him for Persia, his Persia of the tinkling water, of the rose and the nightingale. A voice aroused him.

'No pass, no pass.'

He stopped. He had turned off the mounting narrow main street and was in a cul-de-sac, the end held by several small half-clad urchins playing marbles, who had insistently called a warning.

He turned back in time to see the guide pass the end of the passage. Leslie frowned. Was he being followed? He waited a moment, smiling at the boys. Then he walked out to the street where he saw the guide, at the next turning above, looking about in some perplexity. Possibly, however, the man was used to the ordinary tourist who, when lost, looks upon the guide who springs from the pavement, as a friend. The man, indeed, acted upon this experience and turned back to meet Leslie, repeating his former offer. Leslie again waved him aside and went on. After some five minutes of walking he found himself at the entrance to the market square, the grand Soko. It was market day and the large space, surrounded

by nondescript buildings, half Moorish, half European, spaced by Moorish arches and dominated by a new and garish mosque, was packed with people. Leslie stopped on the edge of the curb, hating, as he always did, this mixture of the East and the West, from which inevitably resulted the debasement of the native, the vulgarising of the life.

These nasty little Europeans, Jew, Spanish, French, English, who pushed and idled, bartered and stared, how trivial they looked beside the simple dignity of the prosperous Moors in jellabs of rich colour, or even beside the scantily dressed men of free carriage in from the hills.

Along the curb before their baskets of coin sat the money changers, cross-legged upon their cushions, and Leslie stopped to change an English note into native money. With a pocket full of this, he crossed the road to where the Touareg women sat upon the ground beneath their enormous hats of straw, before the piled produce of their gardens. Sun-cured dates and figs, an orange or two, made glorious walking rations, and with a mounting thrill of adventure, with a keen sense of the joy of living, he stood for a moment surveying the roads which led out of the square. Which should he follow? One road only led the way he wished to go, but which?

He counted them. There were seven ways and seven was the mystic number. Of these, three, he knew, led back to the town; one arch, nearly blocked with flower-sellers, gay with mimosa and roses, led into the small fruit market; there remained but three, and as he paused uncertain, from the road to the left of these, a camel-train billowed slowly into view. A camel-train! That was the road he was to take. Swinging his stick, light-hearted, he made his way through the throng. Ah, on the wall at the corner of this road a new French sign bore the legend, 'Route de Fez.' The Fez Road: one of the long roads of pure romance. He peopled it with caravans, with princely missions, with rich merchant trains. His imagination rioted in the colour and the beauty of the East, while his feet in their brown brogues strode on between the new houses of rich Frenchmen and richer Jews, on down the long incline where the air bore waves of scent from orange-groves carpeted with violets.

And now he had left enclosed gardens. Before him spread fields of flowers and rolling hills on hills away to the pale blue mountains. He could have sung for joy. This was his day. He would be happy. What was time but a cheat? A day like this, so brimming full of beauty, a sun chalice, was it not more than years to him? He turned

aside to stand knee-deep in flowers, a spread carpet of marigolds and hyacinths, topped by the swaying blue of iris. Down in every depression, narcissus splashed the green with white.

He returned to the road and strode on. Goldfinches rose in flocks, crested larks took their broken flight — higher and ever higher, while sailing into ken on steady wing a great hawk planed serene. On the slopes, where the ploughman drove his oxen and the wooden plough, pure white cowbirds daintily picked their way along the freshly turned furrow.

And the people were so jolly! He gave a greeting to the peasants, men and women going town-ward, the women bent under burdens of fodder or wood. All returned his smile and kindly word. His memory jumped to the country of his youth, the simple folk who lived on the edge of Exmoor, in the wild country where his father had served the two small parishes as vicar. It was a good day to remember all his happy youth. He saw the small grey church and the handful of houses on Eagle-ridge, he stood amongst the gravestones and looked over the valley and the miles of purple moorland to the horizon. He saw the world again from the depths of those old worn leather arm-chairs in the vicarage library, where hunched he had read long tales of the East, always the East.

He wandered again by the sweet waters of the Barle, trout-rod in hand. Down the years, his memory led him through school and Cambridge days until finally he was back again on the Fez Road which, rising a hill, dipped out of sight before him. What lay over the hill? What was awaiting him there? Could men find life a dull thing when every day held the unexpected, when the world held long roads unfollowed, new heights unexplored? It was incredible. To him life was never dull, only frankly unbearable, bitter and terrible at times.

Now he was nearly at the top of the rise. He had reached it. Ah! of course, the leading lay ahead some quarter of a mile, where a figure on horseback turned sharply off to the right and was lost again behind the hill. A good horse, a full-blooded Arabian; the figure, a boy, he thought.

Down the hill he went and turned into the branching road. The horseman had vanished, but before him was the very place for his midday rest. From the rich, rolling, flower-spread plain rose a wild hill, cliffs of cream and red, clothed on their heights with the feathery grey of wild olive. It was a perfect place. The road struck the base of the hill at a lane, which led between hedges of aloe and wild geranium up the steep incline till it came to end at the top with the olive wood to the left

and to the right a shelf of rock jutting out and overhanging the plain. The view beyond was a sweep of wonder, and Leslie stepped quickly forward before he saw a figure in riding dress which was extended, for the better enjoyment of the view, its full length along the rock, its head propped on its hands at the very edge. It was the rider, the boy whom he had seen. But with the thought came the sense that it was not a boy, but a woman, and, with that, she turned and looked at him and he saw that she was young and beautiful.

CHAPTER IV

‘I BEG your pardon,’ he began in French. ‘I did not see you.’

She did not answer, but with a turn sat up, her arms about her knees, her face grave, but laughter in her dark eyes.

Then, ‘This is my rock,’ she said in English. ‘No one is allowed to come here.’

‘I have already apologised.’ His hat was in his hand, his hair lay in damp rings on his forehead, his grey eyes answered the challenge in hers.

‘Nice clothes,’ she said judicially. ‘Nice brown tweed.’

He bowed with a smile. ‘I like yours.’

She nodded. ‘I like them. London. Clothes do matter such a lot.’ She sighed and rose slowly to her feet. She was tall and slim, boyish in her masculine attire. Only the shirt under the loose riding coat was open at the throat. ‘Well, good-bye,’ she said. ‘I am going.’

Leslie stood aside for her to pass. As she came abreast of him, she paused and shot him a level glance. ‘Did you hear me say good-bye?’

He bowed. ‘I did.’

She hesitated. ‘Well?’

He met her glance. 'Well,' he repeated. 'It seems a pity, doesn't it?'

'A pity?'

'Yes, a waste of the day and the grove.'

She took a step beside him, tapping her boot with her whip. 'I wonder,' she asked, 'what you would think of me if I stayed?'

'That you were kind, jolly kind. You see, I have only to-day.'

'Only to-day? And then?'

'Who knows?' His voice was suddenly serious.

They paused, standing side by side; the top of her head reached his shoulder. She seemed to be considering. Then she turned to him with a frank smile.

'I always do exactly what I like. Men do, why shouldn't girls? Anyway, I do.' She smiled and the world swam before him. 'You came at the right moment, too. I was bored and I had just made up a long story about . . . you, I suppose, when you came . . .'

'Tell me the story,' he begged. 'Shall we sit down?'

She nodded and led the way back to the edge of the rock. 'I always sit at the edge and look over.' She pointed down to the mass of broken rock far below. 'The men from that village over there used to throw their wives off here when they

were unfaithful. It served them right for being found out. I hate stupidity. Our servant Ali found his wife out the other day. She was in love with another servant, Mahomet. Ali couldn't kill her now, but he is going to send her away. It's a bore, because Mahomet has to go too and he's a good man.'

Her English was pure, without an accent. Leslie sitting a little behind her followed the line of her profile against the sky, the straight nose, the short upper lip, the lower slightly fuller, the proud lift of the chin. With a sudden movement she pulled off her hat and he saw that her small head poised on a slender throat, was wound around with shining plaits of smooth dark hair. She talked with little foreign gestures of her hands on one of which she wore a curious old ring of silver incrustated with emeralds. She was neat, complete, and fine, with none of the loose ends which he abhorred. She was perfect, a creature of race, of spirit and fire, yet with a promise of melting softness.

'The story,' he reminded her. But she was perverse.

'See,' she said, 'that is the road to Fez. It wanders like that, on and on. Over there are the Anjera Hills and there is the pass to El Foukara. I know all the roads, and everybody knows me.' It was spoken arrogantly, smiling.

'Don't you think we should be introduced?' he suggested.

'I'm not sure. It's only for a day, and it's so amusing like this.'

'Granted. But we must call each other something, even for to-day.'

'That's true,' she laughed deliciously. 'I will call you by the name that I like best and you call me by the name that you like best.'

'We must have a christening, then.'

'A name day,' she corrected. 'It's a *fête*, our name day. I want, please, a very romantic name.'

'Greek,' he declared. 'Yes, Greek. Don't you see, this is Greece!' He waved a comprehending hand. 'An isle of Greece, the plain is the sea, the waves break in flowers. Look!' He pursued his idea. 'It is classic, pure classic. The men in white ploughing on the hillside, the goatherd with his flute on the rocks below. And we are Greek just for to-day. We have wandered out from Athens hand in hand to pass the day beneath the olive trees.'

'Yes,' she said fascinated. 'Go on.'

He looked at her. 'Of course you really are Greek. That's what the line means.' He drew her head in the air with a sweeping forefinger. 'Pure line, no muddle. And your name is young Phocis, Theocritus's golden girl, and I am her

happy lover, Lysander.' He jumped up with a laughing bow of introduction.

She bent towards him, her eyes wide with fun. 'Lysander,' she declared, 'I'm hungry, starving. Did you bring any food from Athens?'

'Nectar and ambrosia.' He gave her his hand to rise. 'Did you?'

'No. But I can get food, Greek food, here.'

'Here?'

She nodded and lifting a silver whistle to her lips blew it twice. From behind a rock, hardly twenty paces away, a man rose and came forward, a peasant dressed in the brown jellab of the hills. He touched his forehead, gazing at the girl with a mixture of respect and adoration.

'Abdullah,' she said, 'you will bring bread, honey, milk. Go now and speed. The greetings of thy mistress to thy wife and mother.' She spoke with an unexpected dignity. Then turned again to Leslie with a provocative tilt of her head.

'You could not understand?'

'I did, though it is not pure Arabic.'

'It's a hill dialect. His wife was my foster mother.' She spoke again with that touch of dignity. 'So you speak Arabic. The English never do, or very few. They never speak anything well.'

He bowed. 'We shall see. But to-day we speak only that classic tongue . . . of the heart.'

She laughed. 'Isn't it fun?' She started forward, but paused at the edge of the grove, looking back, a hand raised. 'I always go softly into this wood.' Her voice was hushed. 'It is so . . . something.'

He understood. He too was sensitive to such suggestion. For him also the green, rock-strewn glade, where the wild olives gave fantastic shade, held magic. She led him in silence over the short, soft green turf beneath the gnarled branches, to the edge of the cliff, where the silvery lobes of the prickly pear and the glossy leaves of the wild pistachio pushed upward. Below, along the lane by which he had mounted, the bushes of wild geranium showed a mass of rose-coloured blossom. Beyond the lane, the meadow lay green, broken by rivers of white narcissus and lakes of orange marigold. Beyond the meadow the purple hills led in waves to the pale blue mountains. It was one of those moments when Nature takes on a meaning, when beauty of colour and beauty of form in flower and tree and rock, in earth and sky, become spiritualised, when the unimaginative man is merely happy and calls for more beer, when the sensitive are lifted for a space out of this material world and touch the bounds of . . . something.

They stood together for a breath's span and were grateful for the appearance of the man, which

saved them the need of words. As they both turned to meet him, Leslie was aware of a new softness in the girl's face.

'It is well, Abdullah. I will have it here. And you have taken Scimitar? That is well also.' She directed the man briefly, who spread rugs upon the ground, and upon the bright green turf placed a flat panier of rushes. Upon this he arranged brown loaves, cheese in a green leaf, honey in a jar, and a jug of milk.

She turned to Leslie. 'Shall we sit down?'

CHAPTER V

THE moment in which a man and a woman, who have more than a platonic interest in one another, first break bread together alone is fraught with meaning; to them unconsciously the simple ceremony partakes of the significance of a rite and may linger in the memory as long as life lasts. Happy indeed are they to whom chance presents that moment touched with the glow of pure romance. If love can hallow a crust in an attic, how much more can it transform fresh brown loaves beneath an olive tree. And, though they knew it not, love made the third at their first feast, hiding though he was, unguessed by either.

A new constraint settled upon them as they sat down together by the sylvan board. Leslie placed his fruit upon the panier beside the bread. Both hesitated to begin. The moment was not to be squandered. To be young and strong and beautiful, to have found this one spot in all the world set apart and sacred to them — this was a marvel.

Leslie spoke first. 'The place, this place, has been waiting for us for years.'

'For you. I have always known it.'

'For us, I said.'

She coloured slowly. 'Perhaps for us. It's a dear place. The sun is warm here, but the air is always fresh, the grass is always green. I have always wanted . . . expected something to happen here.'

'What?'

'I never thought or knew. Perhaps . . . this. But we are hungry, aren't we? Shall I break the bread?' She proffered the flat brown loaf. 'And milk? Goat's milk? Or, there is water at the spring. But you shall help yourself. And . . . we must laugh to-day!'

He took the jug from her hands slowly. 'To-day?' he queried.

She nodded. 'You said to-day, and I say to-day. We must eat and be happy. Let us laugh at nothing. That is to be happy. Just as the sun shines and the flowers grow, while behind us, under the flowers, are the graves.'

The colour had faded from her face, her eyes were wide.

'You're like a child who tells itself stories, who frightens itself,' he cried, leaning nearer. 'Graves! There are no graves.'

'Si, si,' she insisted. 'There, there, under the olive trees, the flat stones in the long grass. They are graves, the graves of the old hillmen from the village over there.'

'But death, my dear,' he insisted, 'is not sad! They lived and were happy. Now it is our turn. The beauty of life is here. See, Phocis, my little Greek, life is here, life burning in our hearts; that is real!'

She met his eyes with hers questioning, then with a little gesture of acceptance, leant back her head against a tree. 'Ah, you are right, my friend.' Her voice was very sweet. 'The present is all that we have and I am wasting it. For us there is no road again to Athens. But all is here.' Her hand swept in an embracing gesture round the little wood.

For a moment they were silent; then Leslie rose to his knees, quite gravely. 'We must pour a libation,' he said. 'But first we shall weave our garlands of the wild olive, make sacrifice to the Gods of the place. We want the Gods with us, don't we, Phocis? We must weave ourselves garlands and pour the libation upon the earth and call upon the Gods of the place to have us in their keeping.'

'Is it true?' She leant forward eagerly. 'Will it help?'

He saw that she was moved.

'Help? Of course. They will look out for us both.'

'For us both,' she echoed, then rose to her feet

at his side. 'And they told me that the English had no souls! See, I will make your garland and you shall make mine. Of the wild olive branches only? May we not wear roses, myrtle, or any flowers?'

'Wild olive,' he insisted.

'But there are roses in the garden, miles of roses.'

'In what garden?'

She pointed over the hill. 'In my garden.'

'Ah, but not for our garlands. Trust me, Phocis. I know the rules of the game. A chaste green garland, my child. We will take the roses afterwards. Hold up your head! Let me see. Too large. But, my dear, you do look ripping. If I could paint or draw, or had even a beastly camera, what a picture you'd make! Wait! There; it sets down on your smooth head. The Gods will hear you! They must, unless they are blind. There is only one blind God and he's with us now. You are beautiful! Do you mind my talking like this? If you knew what it means to see beauty!' He stopped with a quickly indrawn breath, and lowered his head to receive the crown from her hands. 'I expect I look a silly ass.'

'You don't,' she said. Their eyes met and he hurried on: 'Now, my child, we kneel down. You facing me there. That is right. You're a vestal

and I am a priest. Thank God we're not! And you raise the jug; oh, hold on, that jug ought to have a garland!' He jumped up, full of the game, and gathering a trail of purple convolvulus dropped it over her hands. 'Now, you see, you raise your garlanded jug, and when I have recited the invocation, you pour the libation upon the ground!'

'Genii loci! Gods of the place, we invoke thee! As we pour this libation, we pray for thy protection, Gods of the place! Gods of the place!'

A rifle-shot echoed down the cliff and a bullet clipped its way between them. The brown jug lay shattered on the ground.

The girl sprang to her feet and caught his hand, crying out furiously some words in a dialect he could not understand. But he threw her hand aside.

'So, it's a trap,' he said.

She caught his arm again imploringly. 'Trust me,' she cried, and as a second bullet whistled above their heads, she dragged him with her through the trees. 'Trust me. Quick, to the garden! You don't understand.'

Convinced of her faith and ignorant of his enemy and of the country, he followed her fast down through the trees, where under the brow of the hill he saw with surprise, close below them, a green door in a wall and, beyond, the flat roof

of a house in a garden. She pushed open the gate, none too soon, for another bullet flattened itself against the wall to one side and, as they passed through, a figure in a jellab appeared above through the trees. The girl dropped a heavy wooden bar into the iron socket of the gateposts and stood looking up at him. She was laughing, but angry. 'It's a disgrace,' she said. 'I will have him beaten. The wall is high, but we are better in the house.'

She turned along the golden sandy path to the white walls of the villa. The dark green of the argan met with the lighter green of oleander above their heads. The villa stood on the side of a hill and the garden lay below them; a paradise of flowering trees and roses, a labyrinth of paths through orange groves and bamboo plantations. Leslie had time only for a quick glance before he found himself in the entrance hall of the house.

CHAPTER VI

As in all Moorish houses, the passage in which Leslie and his companion stood ran between blank walls to a wall opposite, where it turned at right angles to the left into a square pillared room with a well in the middle. The girl led him across this through another passage into an inside patio or courtyard open to the sky, where water trickled from a fountain into a marble basin, surrounded by mimosa and orange trees. Light pilasters supported an upper gallery upon which the sleeping-rooms opened. On two sides of the courtyard open to it were the living-rooms of the villa, long shallow apartments whose sole furniture consisted, as in most Moorish houses, of a low divan along the walls, cushions, and a carpet or two. Leslie knew the type of house well and recognized it as the summer dwelling of some rich Moor from the town. At the present season it was evidently untenanted. It had a look of disuse. Dead leaves lay upon the unswept tiles.

The girl stopped short and turned to face him. She was quite composed, though her face was vivid. 'It wasn't anything,' she declared lightly.

'You call it nothing to be fired on, to have our picnic spoilt, the jug broken?'

‘It is not serious, I mean. A nuisance; some one was stupid. I will have him punished. And anyway we are safe now. By the time that you have smoked your cigarette, that stupid one will have gone, and you will be free. I will smoke, too. You are not angry?’

Leslie stood with an uncompromising face. What a damned ass he’d been. What was at the bottom of this? He could not tell. Rapidly he endeavoured to eliminate his mission from the situation. Without that, a mere roving young man, what would he think of it? He frowned, his eyes on the girl. What was she? Who was she?

‘Who am I?’ She answered the unspoken question. ‘Try not to look so stern. Look pleasant, look as if you trusted me, then come and sit down and I’ll explain. Let’s bring the cushions out into the court, into the sun.’

Leslie fetched a pile of gaudy brocaded cushions and placed them on the marble edge of the fountain, under the orange trees. As far as he could see, the girl was completely mistress of the situation, of his fate; his only course one of acquiescence; that and to preserve his dignity, not to look a fool, to be on his guard. He tried to remember what he had said up there in the grove; what information he had given her.

She sat now upon the cushions, her hands

clasped around her knees. 'Voyons,' she cried, breaking into French. 'Pay attention to me. A cigarette!'

He proffered her his case and struck a match for her. He noticed that though his hand trembled a little, hers was quite steady. He lighted a cigarette himself and sat down upon the edge of the marble basin opposite to her. But she did not speak; she sulked and puffed delicately in silence.

What an absurd attitude, he thought. What had he done? If it was not all a put-up job, anyway she had a clue which he did not hold. He glanced at her. The colour and animation had died from her face. She looked strained; she looked older. And how small she was, and how fine! Strength and race combined. But what race? Her English was good, but not perfect; too exact a pronunciation and too throaty a voice.

'Well,' he said finally, and his voice, in spite of himself, was tender.

She sighed, buried the end of her cigarette under the orange tree with a match-end and looked up. 'You tell me first.'

'There is nothing to tell.'

'Oh, that I don't know. I am on my rock. I am at home. And you arrive in the middle of the war in France, an Englishman and quite young. There is something to tell.'

He laughed shortly.

‘My dear child,’ he said. ‘You foreigners can never see any difference between English and Americans, and yet we are not in the least alike. I am not English, or I should be at the front. I am an American, and as my country has not yet come into the war, I am out here doing a little business.’

She did not answer, but leant back amongst the cushions, her chin raised, a look of amused incredulity on her face. He saw that she did not believe a word that he said.

‘And what is your business?’ she drawled.

He bowed. ‘I am the agent for a sewing-machine. Do you take any interest in the subject, Madam?’

She nodded. ‘Yes, I sew. I make my own dancing frocks. You shall see. They are nice. I like a sewing-machine; it saves time. What make is yours?’

Blank dismay filled him. The devil! What make? What brand? An inspiration! ‘A Ford. The man who makes the motor cars. The best sewing-machine going.’

‘And the price?’

He saw that she was laughing.

‘Very cheap, like the Ford car. Of course the price depends upon the style.’

‘Of course. Well, my last one was very good.

Silver-plated with such a dear little gold handle. Have you one like that?’

He felt in his pockets. ‘Alas, I have left the description in the hotel. I will be charmed to give you all the particulars when next we meet.’

‘So you think there will be another meeting?’ Her manner suddenly lost its lightness. She quickly recovered. ‘Eh bien, you are not a very good agent. You will not do much business if you cannot tell the ladies all about it. Now, I will teach you. I bought one from an American last year. You must first say the names of all the other machines. You must say why they are not good. And then you must say: “And now to explain the merits of the machine which I am offering,” and then you must be eloquent and describe it with many words.’ She looked him up and down, her head on one side. ‘No, I should say that you have not sold many! But now, will you not tell me your name? We are no more beneath the olive trees. Athens is very far, Lysander. And Lysander is a silly name for every day.’ Her voice dropped, she spoke like a child. ‘I want to know your name, your true name.’

A great and absurd happiness leapt in his heart. What was the use of lying to her? If she were as innocent as she seemed, the truth could do no harm. If she were as sophisticated as she seemed,

she would find him out anyway. The whole thing seemed on the knees of the Gods or in her hands. He looked down at those little white hands and then up into her still face, and for a moment their eyes questioned each other.

‘Leslie Stewart,’ he said.

‘Late Consul at Ispahan and Captain in His Majesty’s forces.’ Her voice was very clear and low and her eyes held his.

‘So that’s it,’ he said.

She nodded. ‘Yes.’

Their eyes held each other still; then he turned away.

There was silence in the courtyard. The water tinkled as it fell from the fountain; a light breeze swept the topmost branches of the feathery mimosa; high above them a cloud drifting across the blue hid the light of the sun. With a shiver the girl sprang to her feet and her face was white and tragic, that little face which changed with every mood. She stood for a moment, her hands tightly clasped, gazing at his taut figure and bent head.

‘Oh, please,’ she begged.

He turned roughly. ‘Well, what do you want? What are you after?’

‘Nothing. Nothing . . . yet.’ She faced him, her eyes honest. ‘Don’t you see, it is our day.

You said so too. Your day and my day. We are friends to-day. We have eaten together.'

'And you have saved my life.' His voice was hard. 'What is your game?'

She ignored his tone. 'Oh, Lysander, it's the best game. Let us play it to the end!' Her face was aglow, her voice reckless. 'It's a glorious game. The game I always play. Life and death and war and love!' She laughed. 'I play that game always and always "*I play the game*," as the English say. Perhaps' — she caught her breath — 'you don't believe it?'

He turned towards the passage. 'I don't know what to believe. But now, with your permission, I must be going. I have waited here too long.'

She sprang ahead of him, her face as cold as his own. 'I go first,' she said. She was moving swiftly, a slight, erect, boyish figure. Back to the room of the well they went, where she stopped pointing to a ring in the floor. 'Will you lift it?' He obeyed. A flight of steps led down into the darkness. 'I go first,' she said again with emphasis. 'Pull down the door and give me your hand; I know the way.' Again he obeyed. The door fell into place above their heads. They were in darkness. He groped for and found her fingers. They were cold. 'Ten steps down.' Her voice was impersonal. 'We turn to the left. It is rather muddy.

There's a spring. It isn't far. We come out at the foot of the garden. It's rather rough here. There, you see the light.' She dropped his hand.

Before them, some hundred yards, was a grey hole in the darkness. They emerged from the hillside into a thicket of bamboo. The sun had already set. The girl turned. 'I will take you to the garden gate. All you have to do is to follow the track outside to the left around the base of the hill. It will take you into the road by which you came this morning.'

He bowed and followed her through the bamboo. It was almost dark in the shade of the cypresses near the gate. She laid her hand on the latch and turned to him. Her face was a pale spot in the darkness.

'You are safe now. You will be in the town in less than an hour.'

He began some futile words of thanks. He looked down on her uncertainly. A sudden longing seized him to take her in his arms, to crush her to him. He turned abruptly and passed out through the gate.

CHAPTER VII

ALTHOUGH the sun had set it was still early as Leslie struck into the road which ran around the base of the hill. The rocks showed palely in the dusk and the olive grove above was a blur against the sky. Hedges of aloe bordered the way and as he walked he had an uneasy feeling, a strange conviction, that behind there, some one followed him; that a figure crept along to the right and just behind him. It was not a pleasant sensation, and he wished for a moment that he was armed. He reasoned with himself. He had heard nothing, seen nothing; then why did he so certainly know of the presence of that creeping figure? That sixth sense, of course, in which all but fools believe. It warned him; he stopped short.

‘*Bismillah.*’ He gave the Arab greeting. ‘Who goes there? And why? Come into the open.’ His voice speaking fluently the Arabic tongue had the ring of authority which commands obedience.

There was a rustle and a voice replied: ‘*Bismillah!* I do but follow His Excellency for safety, at the order of the Honourable Lady,’ and a man in a jellab pushed his way through a gap in the hedge. Leslie recognised him as the peasant who had brought the food at noon.

‘Ah, Abdullah! And what is there to fear?’

The man looked stubborn. ‘It is her will,’ he replied. ‘His Excellency might lose the way.’

Leslie smiled. ‘It must be done then, if the lady wills?’

The man looked stubbornly back, assenting.

‘And if I do not will?’

The man looked patient. ‘I have my duty and I do it.’

‘Good,’ said Leslie. ‘Come on then; though there is no danger to the brave.’ He struck out at a good pace along the road which leaving the hedges behind became a grey ribbon winding through the flowered fields of the morning.

Now all the wealth of colour was lost and only the pale rivers of narcissus shone white in the early starlight. Abdullah, he knew, was following on sure, silent feet, every now and then lessening the distance between them as they met belated parties returning from the market, all simple folk following the road back to their villages in the hills.

The air was cold but dry, and the walk was exhilarating. Leslie tried to think calmly, to reason, to keep down the sheer joy of living that filled him. He wanted to shout and to sing, and yet he knew that he ought, were he rational, to feel rather the shadow of danger upon him. What did the events

of the day portend? What did it all mean? What danger? His reason told him that the girl was a spy. But he laughed at reason. It was a game, as she had said. They were both in it to win . . . or lose. Again he sternly told himself that he was not serious enough. And again his mounting spirits counselled: 'Have done with old men's saws. Live adventurously; now is your chance.' 'But,' said prudence, 'you must report the whole story to Rossiter as soon as you get in.' 'Be damned if I do,' shouted the super-self. 'It's a secret, hers and mine.' 'But she is a spy.' 'Ah, she plays the game.' 'For Spain?' He shrugged impatiently. He knew nothing; who she was, nor what she was. But he knew this: that he should see her again. They would meet again.

Now the road dipped down and the lights of the town appeared. As Leslie mounted the last incline to the town gate, Abdullah's voice sounded out of the dark in a farewell greeting, while at the same time the quick hoof-beats which had followed him for some moments from the road behind, grew to a gallop and a horse dashed past him and was swallowed up in the vast arch of the gate ahead, but not so swiftly that the wan light of the single oil lamp did not reveal the gallant poise of a light and boyish figure.

Within the gates Leslie asked the way to the

American Consulate and under the guidance of a small boy, soon found himself outside a wrought-iron gate surmounted by the arms of the United States. A moment later he was following a stately major-domo in native dress across a courtyard under towering palms, through a corridor and had clasped hands with Rossiter who stood with his back to an open wood fire in the long drawing-room.

Rossiter gave an ejaculation of relief. 'Glad that you have turned up safely. I was getting a little anxious. Where did you go?'

'I walked out to the olive grove. The sun sets early. You know that the East holds no terrors for me.'

'Quite so,' the old man agreed. 'Will you have a smoke? Then we'll talk of your plans for to-morrow.'

Leslie took a cigarette and as he lit it surveyed the room with an appreciative eye. A delightful room it was, of fine proportions, where old carpets made isles of subdued colour upon the dark floor, and pale walls were spaced by the dull gold of frames and by panels of old red brocade. Two swinging lamps of silver threw a soft glow from under crimson shades upon the treasures that enriched the room. Yet there was no overcrowding. It was a beautiful room.

'A good spot, this, sir,' Leslie commented. 'You've got some jolly things.'

The older man brightened. 'Well, you see, it's my great pleasure. I am very fond of antiques. Have you ever heard the story of this house? The Sultan of Morocco was the first power after France to acknowledge the independence of the United States and presented this old palace to the young Republic as a future Consulate. We've had it for over a hundred years, but nothing much had been spent on it until I came. It is my plaything and my joy. I have put in bathrooms, had chimneys built, put in fireplaces and laid the parquet floors.'

'You've got some good carpets.'

'Prayer rugs. Yes, when I came here the dealers told me that the day for such bargains was over. But I've had men looking out for me for years. Many of these are priceless now, priceless. If I were to tell you the story of half the things in this room, we should be here all night. They come to me now from everywhere. See that little rug over there? Persian antique. A man from that hill-village by the olive grove got that one for me when he made the pilgrimage. Brought it back from Mecca and was well paid for it. They know that I pay. Pretty spot, the olive grove, eh?'

'Charming, charming.'

'Beautiful view.'

'Oh, beautiful.'

'Did you go any farther?'

'Not far. I enjoyed the sun. Just down by a villa on the other side. Looked like a nice garden. Who does it belong to?'

'Oh, that villa. I don't know now. It is always changing hands. The last time that I knew anything about it, it was the property of a Russian. That was before the war. Was any one living there?'

'It seemed empty.'

'Very likely. Now to your affairs. Just come here and I will give you the papers and tell you what I've done.' He led the way within an alcove to his desk, a table of carved and gilded wood, the loot at some day past, of a Spanish church. It was covered with a marvellous piece of thin Milanese velvet upon which lay a portfolio of Moroccan leather from Fez between two old silver candlesticks. Rossiter picked up a paper.

'This is your passport,' he said. 'It's in order. All it needs is your signature to make it complete.'

Leslie unfolded the large official-looking document, such as those with which the United States provides its citizens, and read himself therein described as travelling on purposes of business. When he had finished the perusal Rossiter handed

him a second document. It was a prospectus of the Singer sewing-machine. 'I advise you,' he said with a laugh, 'to read up a little on your wares to-night. The machine is with your luggage in your bedroom, and this,' he handed over an envelope, 'is the key to the case.'

He led the way back to the fire. 'As for to-morrow's arrangements, the Ford will be at the door at 7:30; so they have promised. As you know, that may mean any hour. But I am sorry to say the boy won't go with you; won't drive; won't go at all. Nothing will persuade him to take that trip. It's only by the most solemn guarantees that I've got the car for you. And now that I've done my part, Stewart, I want you to go no farther without a full understanding of the risk. What about making El Foukara by sea? From Gib to Ceuta, and from there by car?'

'And waste three more days? No, sir. I am going through to-morrow; going to have a try for it. And I'm not sorry to be alone. I should not like the responsibility of the boy. One's risks ought to be one's own.'

Rossiter nodded his approval. 'I only wish I were twenty years younger and free to be your companion. However, I am glad to have been of some service. There was never a time when we English-speaking people should stand closer than

to-day.' He spoke earnestly and blowing his nose shook the young man's hand with vigour.

'There's just a quarter of an hour to dinner. What do you say to looking in at the Spanish Café after? There's not bad dancing at times.'

'Right-o,' Leslie agreed.

CHAPTER VIII

‘SINCE I am the representative of the two greatest nations on earth, I allow myself an escort when I go abroad at night,’ Rossiter said as they stepped into the street after dinner. The tall major-domo in his white jellab preceded them with a lantern, while a second servant followed. ‘It maintains the prestige of our countries, eh?’

Thus lighted, they plunged down the steep and narrow streets, under arches, through tiny squares, and emerged in the little Soko, where the three rival cafés, with their wavering lamps, made a space of light. Across this square they went, and entered a cul-de-sac, at the end of which stood a closed door lighted by a flare of gas. The major-domo knocked and the door was opened by a small black boy whose head was shaved except for a shiny braided lock which hung over one ear.

Rossiter led the way into a large room whose bare ugliness was enhanced by the crude attempts at fresco on the walls, and by the tawdry setting of a little stage. Opposite the door by which they entered, a broad staircase draped with a pair of looped and fringed plush curtains, led up to a gallery which ran around the room and from which

couples seated at small tables looked down into the room below. On the bottom step of the stairs stood a small and solemn black boy dressed in a jellab of pure coral colour, holding in his hands a flat straw panier piled with camellias, violets, and single rosebuds. He stood quite still, his round childish face amusingly grave, leaning against the looped red curtain.

The room was furnished with bare tables and rush-bottomed chairs which were filled by a crowd whose quiet appearance entirely belied their true character. Rossiter and Leslie moved to a table to the left, facing the stage, and sat down with their backs to the wall. The curtain was still down across the stage. The dancing had not begun, but the pianist, a woman with short yellow hair and the face of a French poster, had already taken her seat at the piano which with a violin composed the orchestra. Rossiter looked about the room, nodding to one or two. 'The cashier at the bank, a little Jew. And that is Yousseff, who teaches Arabic to the embassies. Almost all Spaniards, with a sprinkling of Moors.' He ordered drinks from the one waiter with some care.

The piano began an accentuated fandango, the violin caught it up, the music went with a swing. The curtains parted and a young Spanish girl with the awkward grace of adolescence stepped out on

the stage. She had a good-natured round face, a rose stuck above one ear and the traditional mantilla hung from a high silver comb over her black hair. Her pretty arms had the rounded contours of childhood and as she danced she sang a song of doubtful character with the innocent look of a baby. She danced heavily, but the *salle* clapped its approval, to her evident satisfaction. She sang and danced for friends. When the curtain closed, she quickly appeared in the room and was hailed with *cameraderie* by a group of boys at the next table to Leslie. She came to them, swaying her hips, pouting her red mouth and smiling at Rossiter who nodded to her.

‘I’ve known her since she was ten. Her mother, the *señora*, runs the place. A bad old woman, but the child is all right thus far.’ He lifted his glass to the girl: ‘Rosita!’ She replied, laughing.

‘An amusing kid,’ Leslie agreed, ‘but not much of a dancer.’

‘No good at all,’ Rossiter echoed, ‘and the next girl is not much better. Then there’s some bad singing, but after that there is an Andalusian who is worth seeing, I believe. She’s been dancing here for a fortnight. Too good for the place.’ He proceeded to communicate a certain amount of local history to his guest and kept Leslie amused while one boring item followed another on the

programme. After each, the performer came from the stage to join the men in the hall and soon the panier of flowers was empty. At last a thrill of expectation and the addition of late comers announced that the attraction of the evening was at hand. The blonde-haired pianist settled herself with a gesture of importance, the violinist glanced at the audience and the girls at the tables prepared to turn their bored attention to the stage. The pianist sat on awaiting the signal, the audience growing impatient stamped, and the Señora, hitherto in the background, made a hasty appearance, stout and flushed and harshly tinted, upon the stairs between the curtains and announced to the salle that through a sudden indisposition *La Bella Cavalina* was unable to appear as advertised.

This information was greeted by a boo of disappointment, above which the Señora endeavoured to make herself heard. Her voice rose to a roar and by sheer force the room was brought to listen. 'You will not listen?' she shrieked. 'But I tell you a better one will dance. Yes, better than *La Bella*. It is *La Maschera*. You will tell me if I do not speak true. I will give you back your money if I do not speak true!' She bowed, signalled to the piano, and vanished.

The pianist struck the first note of a popular

bolero. The salle stamped approval and the curtains parted. Two bars followed before the dancer sprang into the centre of the stage and stood for one moment challenging the room, her head thrown back, a slight, exquisite figure, her small bust and waist held close in a straight bodice of silver, the skirt of emerald and silver swaying above her little scarlet shoes. Her small head, banded with black hair, was poised on a lovely throat, but the salle roared; her face was masked! She stood, her hands clasping her waist and then with consummate art and matchless grace, she glided into the grave and stately measure of the most classic of Spanish dances. She held her audience spellbound. In the slow and languorous succession of poses there was that hint of passion, that maddening restraint which communicates more emotion than any livelier measure, which foretells thrillingly of the moment to come, when with the change of tempo there will come a change of mood.

The salle was breathless, but while Rossiter leaned forward following every movement, Leslie sat back, his face white, his heart beating to suffocation. It was she! It was . . . who? A quick flush of anger swept over him. What was she doing here? It was hell. And she was dancing for him; he knew that she was dancing to him!

How could she? Was she then — this? And, if so, what next?

The tempo changed and the light figure in silver and green whirled around the little stage in an abandonment which was yet all beauty. Leslie following her every movement gave thanks for that, no hint of vulgarity, no flaw. It was matchless dancing. And when working up to a grand finale, she ended, not on tiptoe with the classic flourish above her head, but tensely still, her face buried in the scarlet flowers with which her hands were full, the audience went mad. 'Unmask!' they cried. 'Unmask!' as the curtain closed, and 'Unmask!' they continued to shout, but the curtain did not open nor did the dancer reappear.

Rossiter sat back mopping his forehead. 'By Jove,' he said. 'By Jove!'

But the salle still roared till the Señora, triumphant, again took her stand upon the stair. 'Alas, my children,' she shrieked, 'you may save your voices. She has gone. Come now, be reasonable. I have given you a great moment; it is over. Good-night.'

She bowed to them mockingly. They knew the Señora. The tumult subsided. Men and women drifted up the stairs to finish the night in the gambling room.

Rossiter stood up. Leslie spoke quickly: 'Look

here, sir, could not you find out from the old woman who the dancer was? Wouldn't she tell you?' He wondered if his voice sounded thick and uncertain. His blood was pounding in his ears. 'It would be interesting to know.'

Rossiter shook his head. 'I'll try if you like; but the Señora is a good old sort in a way. I don't believe that she will tell.' He looked at Leslie smiling. 'Perhaps it is as well not to ask,' he drawled.

Leslie followed him into the street. The servants stood waiting, white jellab against white wall. The major-domo again led the way with the lantern, Rossiter followed and as Leslie stepped forward after him, the second servant with a hasty and secretive movement, drew his hand from the folds of his jellab. He held a scarlet flower. Leslie looked at it, for an instant amazed, the flower was in his hand and then he plunged it into the pocket of his ulster. He was dazed, exultant, and unafraid. Was Rossiter talking? He did not hear, though he answered mechanically.

Within his hand he held the world, all passion, all scent, all softness, all desire. He crushed the flower and felt a crispness, a core, something unlike leaf or petal. His fingers moving delicately, all his perception in their tips, detected the thin paper in the flower's heart. Again his pulse was

beating furiously, filling his being with its wild measure. And Rossiter, turning on the steps of the Consulate, looked curiously at the inscrutable face of his guest who had responded to his remarks with such an uncertain lack of interest. 'Poor fellow,' he thought, 'he is thinking of to-morrow.' And he was!

CHAPTER IX

‘A DRINK before you go up?’ Rossiter was hospitably insistent, standing by the tray set invitingly near the fire.

‘Not to-night, sir, if you don’t mind.’

The scrap of paper was now in the inner pocket of his coat and his one desire was for an instant escape to his room where he might read it. But his host thought otherwise. Sure that the boy’s nerves were on the jump and that he needed distraction, he pressed Leslie into a chair while he drank his own whisky and smoked a last cigar. The interval was made bearable to Leslie because his host’s topic proved to be the only one which for the moment held any interest for him.

‘Shall I tell you whom I believe that girl to be?’ Rossiter asked abruptly. ‘Perhaps you won’t know if I tell you; and if you are tired, it’s a long story.’

‘Not a bit,’ Leslie declared, helping himself to the refused refreshment and sitting forward in his chair.

Rossiter gave him a keen glance. He liked the man, liked his grey eyes, his square forehead and the crisp backward wave of fairish hair, liked

the strength of the face redeemed from harshness by the charming smile. He would have liked a son like this.

‘How tall are you?’ he asked abruptly.

‘Six one in my stockings.’ Leslie was lighting a cigarette to hide his impatience.

Rossiter recalled himself from a long journey, one he often made, to the things that might have been.

Leslie was waiting. ‘Who is she?’ the words burst out. His gaze was direct, his voice imperative.

Rossiter shook his head. ‘It is mere surmise. But I know the place. There is just one woman who could do it, and only one woman who would dare. She dares anything.’

‘Yes?’

‘Concha Nicholson.’

‘Nicholson? You mean —?’

‘His daughter.’

‘Daughter . . . But . . .’

‘Her mother was half Spanish, half Berber.’

‘Yes? Do go on. Where does she live? What is her position?’

‘It’s difficult to explain. I said it was a long story.’

‘Oh, please go on, sir. The length does not matter.’

Rossiter hesitated, speaking slowly. 'Nicholson was a great man in his way, a great figure. It's a pity you could not have known him.'

'I saw him once,' Leslie interpolated, 'at a levée in London. I was very young and thrilled to the romance of the man. I even dreamt' — he laughed nervously — 'of following him and of reaping glory on these very fields of fortune.'

'Ah, I am glad that you saw him. That race of men is dying out. You know his story; every one does. A subaltern at Gib he saw the future in Morocco and seized the moment. He was a romantic figure, so popular, that it is difficult now to separate truth from legend. Such stories as were told about him! But he was extraordinarily brave. One of those men who do not know fear. He loved adventure for its own sake, though that did not prevent his amassing a fortune. He could not help it. Sultans fought for his favour. He owned Morocco, held its fate in his hands. If he had been a bigger man, a man of greater principle, he might have used his influence to great imperial ends, and Morocco might to-day be the outpost of England's Eastern Empire. As it was, he was content to live every day to the full, to wield an unparalleled personal influence, the real ruler of Morocco, behind the Sultan's throne. He was one of that group of men who pampered the young Sultan —

a mere boy — and pandered to his love of novelty. You know the stories: the fountain of scent, the gold cameras, the silver bicycles, the gilded coach drawn by slaves. Not a creditable page.'

'But surely he reformed abuses, reorganized the Army? I have heard — one has read —'

'The Army, yes. And to give him his due, he would probably have brought in many other reforms, had he not found that his own position depended upon the complaisance of a corrupt Pasha and court, who were opposed to all reform. He drew up a just scheme of taxation, but withdrew it when he saw that pushing it would only end in his own downfall. Doubtless in his youth he had great ambitions, but the longer you live in the East, the more surely do you realize that you cannot impose here any Western code. You know that.'

Leslie nodded.

'Of course such a man was a great lover. His life was full of amatory adventure. But this girl's mother was the love of his life. He met her in Fez. She was the daughter of a Berber chief; one of those Princes of the Atlas who own no sovereign; who are amongst the proudest, the fiercest, the most generous men alive. Her mother was a Spanish captive, of a great family. The girl was in Fez in her father's train and the rumour of her beauty

got abroad. These things are known. Nicholson was fascinated by the story, her lineage, her beauty. And at a moment when the Sultan would have given him the stars from the sky, he asked for her. The Sultan made a demand for her to the old chief on behalf of Nicholson, whose fame was known beyond the Atlas and Nicholson got her. She was the great passion of his life. I've met men who had seen her, seen Nicholson with her at Fez. She must have been exceptionally beautiful and charming. Intelligent, too. Nicholson worshipped her. He had her taught. She lived only to please him and died giving birth to his child.'

There was silence for a moment.

'And the child?' Leslie's voice was low.

Rossiter sighed. 'She was the apple of her father's eye. He had no son, but she was son and daughter. She had the beauty of her mother, the charm of the East, with his own reckless spirit, his own contempt of danger. She lived like a queen in his palace in Fez, subject to no one, following her own caprices and holding in Morocco a unique position. She was adored by the hillmen; not the Moors of the towns, but by the fierce tribesmen, her mother's people. Yet while she accepted their homage, she never forgot that she was a daughter of Spain, a child of the hidalgos

and though she adored her father, she hated the English. This was the result, I believe, of her tutelage under a Spanish governess, a lady who was engaged by Nicholson when the girl was growing up. After Nicholson's death, just before the massacres in Fez, which they said would never have taken place if he had been alive, the girl was heart-broken. She would not eat nor sleep, nor speak. Finally the Señora brought her away from Fez by main force, took an old palace here out of the town and there they have been ever since. The girl has a fortune. She has once been to England. The King received her — her father's daughter. She bears his name, but she would have none of our life. She returned with the Señora and lives here, independent, wilful, fearless, indifferent to the opinion of the society of the place. They, of course, alternately court and abuse her. She does not try to shock them. She really does not care what any one thinks. She does what she pleases. And to make an end of a long story, I believe that it was Concha Nicholson who danced for us to-night. Why she did it, I cannot say. Probably a caprice.'

'But isn't there any one to stop her?' Leslie cried. 'A girl so young.'

'Twenty.'

'A lady. It's monstrous. Even in these days.'

Rossiter shook his head. 'No one has any authority over her. She's an amazing jumble of contradictions. Gentle and charming at times. But with Nicholson's roving blood and questing spirit, — poor child.'

He turned his back to Leslie, looking fussily for something which he could not find.

Leslie rose slowly. 'How will it end?' he asked blankly.

Rossiter turned and met his eyes. 'God knows,' he said. 'And nobody cares. That's the pity of it — so young, so beautiful, so gifted, so gallant, and no one to care. Good-night.'

CHAPTER X

LESLIE closed the door of his room. It was one stride only to the light above the dressing-table. What had she to say to him, this strange, astounding, fascinating child who could dance like the stars, ride like a centaur, who was the daughter of Nicholson, his hero, — his lady of the olive wood. He drew the crumpled flower from his pocket, crimson and faded, holding the tiny roll of paper in its heart. With a mounting sense of excitement and a thrill of ecstasy, he unfolded and smoothed the tiny scroll. Upon it were written two lines in French: 'Stop; they do not need your sewing-machines in El Foukara.'

He laughed. He crushed the paper to his lips and laughed again. Opened it again, smoothed it, re-read the words and again laughed, as he turned with it again, crushed in his palm, to pace the room.

Of course she did not expect him to heed her warning, she of the blood of heroes! Yet she had sent it. Why? Because she feared for him? Did she care then a little? Could she care a *little* for anything or anybody? Did he not know that with her it would be all for all?

What a gorgeous pageant of a world it was! As he stopped in his walk, he saw the case on the floor by his bed. Agent for a sewing-machine. It added a touch of farce. Of course she had seen the absurdity at once. He drew out the circular that Rossiter had given him. He turned the leaves, looking for a silver machine with a little golden handle. There was nothing of the kind. They were all humdrum affairs of wood and steel, with attachments of odd name, hemmers and gatherers. Of course she was joking, pulling his leg. He wondered how much was true of what she had said and came to the conclusion that she had said very little. Yet if Rossiter was not certain of the identity of La Bella Maschera, he was. The dancer was the girl of the olive grove and that girl was Concha Nicholson. That was the explanation for all; for her manner, her speech, her dress, for her contempt of convention, her influence with the natives, her fearlessness. He was intoxicated with the thought. It was very late, but he felt no need of sleep and it was only the wish to hurry on to to-morrow that compelled him to seek a few hours of oblivion. That to-morrow would bring him to her, he knew. How or why or where, mattered not. But on his way or at his journey's end, she would surely be.

When he awoke in the morning, it was with a

moment's bewilderment and then a quick searching of the mind for something ineffable, wonderful, which was waiting to give him happiness. He leapt from his bed. All the feelings of the evening rushed back. But he steadied himself, hummed a contented tune as he dressed. He had been a little mad; he had presumed too much. He had work to do. He would see her perhaps when he came back; now sterner duties were before him. He stopped his tune. He packed his few belongings neatly, closed the bag, gave a final glance about the room and went down to breakfast. Rossiter was waiting for him, very nervous, but masking his feelings by a detailed attention to Leslie's comfort.

'They've packed you a small hamper, bread and butter, cold chicken, fruit, a bottle of wine.'

'But I shall be at El Foukara by lunch time, with any luck!'

'Better to be prepared. If your car were stuck — bad mudholes — And just slip this flask in your pocket. Are you armed?'

'As a quiet American citizen selling sewing-machines?' Leslie asked smiling.

'A Westerner usually carries a gun in a hip pocket. It won't do any harm.'

'I have my automatic.'

'That's right. Keep it handy. You never know. And now, here is the money from the safe. I'm

rather concerned about it; where had you better put it?’

The old man stood with the packets in his hand. ‘No, don’t stop your breakfast. No one will be in again till I ring. How did you bring this out?’

Leslie was both amused and touched. ‘It was in the captain’s safe till I landed here. I slept with it under my pillow at the hotel and I had it in my coat at breakfast. I did not let it go till you took it over.’

‘But to-day, in case . . .’

‘Well, in case . . . ?’

‘Wouldn’t it be wiser . . .’

‘What do you suggest? Mind, sir, I’m going through all right. But to please you . . .’

‘Why not lock the money in the sewing-machine? No one would look for it there. You’ve got the key.’

Leslie’s heart gave a thump. The old man was afraid for him. The girl had warned him. Well, he must go on. What was the best thing to do with the money? What an odd situation, when money must be carried, not sent by wire or post. He tried to think clearly. If he were shot or captured and the money was on him, it would be taken. In the sewing-machine there might be a chance for it. He looked up with a shade of anxiety.

‘You know conditions here better than I do. As I understand it the danger is from the hillmen,

not from the Spaniards. Being a neutral I pass the Spanish blockhouse safely. The question is, how best to conceal the money in case I am shot or captured by the hillmen.'

'Exactly.'

'Well, in that unlikely event, they'd get it at once on me. There is a better chance, as you say, in the machine. The car would get through somewhere, sometime. You'd know what it carried. I think you are right.'

Leslie rose. 'Well, I'll go up to my room and lock it up. Will you send the man up in five minutes for the luggage? It will be ready.'

He wheeled out of the room and went quickly upstairs, shut and bolted his door, unlocked the machine case, drew the thin packets of bank notes from his pocket and crammed them into the machine case. He could just get them in and had closed and locked it when he heard the man coming to fetch the things. He unbolted the door noiselessly and was standing by the window when the man entered.

Leslie turned. 'Ah, take down the luggage. This and the sewing-machine. I don't want that machine scratched; roll it up in an old cloth or something and put it in behind.'

He followed the man downstairs. Rossiter met him in the hall. Their farewells were hearty.

‘Many thanks to you, sir, for your help with the papers. If I were not a mad American I’d take your advice and stay here with you. But we Americans like a little adventure and I don’t expect there’ll be any trouble. You’ll see me back in less than a week.’

The attentive major-domo turned as the porter signalled that the luggage was in the car. The two men clasped hands in a grip that conveyed many things: courage, good wishes, and real affection on the part of the older man, and gratitude and determination on that of the younger. Rossiter followed Leslie across the patio to the street.

‘You’ll need your warm ulster. Driving is cold in this weather, crossing the hills. You’ve got good warm gloves, I see.’

Leslie stood by the car. The machine, wrapped in a bit of a sacking was in the back with his bag. The petrol tank was full and extra tins were aboard, a shovel too and a length of rope. Tips were bestowed. He jumped in, settled himself behind the wheel, raised his hand to Rossiter and glided off down the street.

The major-domo followed his master into the house.

‘A brave English milor,’ he said.

‘American,’ Rossiter corrected firmly.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was no possibility of leaving the town by side streets for the good reason that only the main artery was wide enough for a motor to pass. Leslie therefore guided the car from the Consulate down the hill into the little Soko, that square where the cafés, so gay the night before, were now deserted. At one a waiter swept the sawdust along the floor between the little iron tables. At another an Arab vendor sat arranging his wares — cheap embroidered slippers and imitation jewellery — in a basket to catch the morning buyers. Leslie crossed the square and set his car at the hill which ran between little shops to the big Soko.

The large square was this morning a place of hard, red earth, empty save for the camel-train of yesterday which was hunched in a brown mass under the one tall palm tree, near the new white mosque. The car ran out on the far side. Leslie had no need of a map yet. His way lay along the road that he had followed the day before. As far as the olive grove he knew his road. From there, instead of turning to his right, it ran straight on into the heart of the Anjera Hills. As he left the square between the gardens whose perfume could

not be held within their high walls, he felt that this road which had led him so well yesterday, must lead him right to-day. It was a good augury that the Route de Fez was the very road that he must go. She had pointed from the rock where they had sat the way that he must follow through the distant pass in those faint, far blue hills. His mind was full, not of his mission, but of the girl, as he struck the level between the flowering fields. What a life she had led! Only twenty, and free since her seventeenth year. Heiress, too, not only of her father's fortune, but of his wild endearing ways. He remembered the stories that he had heard of Nicholson's power over men; the power to win obedience, fealty, love. This girl inherited that. What had she said? 'I know all the roads. Every one knows me.' Arrogantly said, with an upward tilt of her head. Of course every one knew her. And how right he had been in his intuitive faith in her. Reason had certainly counselled a full confession to Rossiter, had whispered that here was official information which had only come to her through organised channels. Yet, in spite of reason, he had trusted her. Why? Because she was Nicholson's daughter and, so, worthy of all trust. He had felt it before he had known who she was.

The Ford was running smoothly, skimming

along in its awkward Fordish way, like a box out for an airing. Leslie with a free hand felt for his pistol. It was just inside his coat, where he could draw it in an instant at need. But was there really any danger? It was hard to imagine death lurking ahead along that road through the flowered fields. The sun shone brightly and just before him was the turn to the olive grove. His heart began to beat amazingly. He knew that in the back of his mind he had held an unreasoning hope of seeing her, here, upon his road. She knew of his destination, that he must pass this way. Yet Rossiter had plainly said that she lived with her Señora along the coast road at the other side of the town, where the foreigners dwell. It was early; she was probably still asleep. It was absolutely ridiculous to imagine that she would be here. He would not look; he would pretend that he had never cherished that wild hope. Yes, here was the corner; down there, if he would but turn his head, he would see the cliffs, the olive grove. But he would not, and keeping his eyes doggedly before him, he left the lane behind him. Once past it, he felt a wave of sick disappointment. She might have come. Immeasurably depressed, he drove on along a cactus-hedge which ended at a wall — the villa wall! Yes, there, facing him was the very door by which he had left the garden. He slowed

the car, that he might enjoy the memory of her look, her voice. And, then, the incredible happened; for the blue door, the blue-green door, opened and she stepped out, the same slim, boyish figure against the white wall.

The Ford stopped. For a moment the two regarded each other without speech or movement. Then she came quickly forward, and stopped, her hands pressed together. She was very pale. 'Didn't you get my note? Why are you going on?'

'Because I must. You don't expect me to chuck my job at anybody's warning, even yours? I assure you,' he smiled, 'that sewing-machines *are* wanted at El Foukara.'

But she had no answering smile for him. 'You don't understand,' she insisted. 'You don't understand. What right have you English here anyway? Leave us to fight out our own battles. Don't you see it is not fair?'

The colour had mounted now to her cheeks. 'Why do you always come where you are not wanted? This time, I warn you, it will be in vain. You will fail.'

'Not I,' Leslie answered sharply. 'You're no daughter of your father to talk like this.'

He was angry, and disregarding the sudden passion of pain in her face, sent the car forward. Then with a stab of compunction, he slowed up,

turned and waved to her. 'So long, good luck,' he shouted.

She stood as if transfixed, and then springing forward cried sharply after him: 'Don't shoot. Remember, whatever may happen, don't shoot!' She turned and the blue door closed behind her.

How devilish of her to try to stop him! What cheek to talk like that! His ire burned high as the car sped on. Then the pain in her face smote him afresh. He'd been rather a brute. Well, this ended the matter. The affair had been short and sweet. After all, was she any better than an adventuress? Again her face reproached him. It had the look of a child unjustly punished. Oh, hell!

Anyway she was a sportsman to give him the warning about the gun. She was probably right. His best chance was in a pacific attitude towards . . . well, any one who interfered. She was a sportsman to swallow her pride like that.

What an empty road! No travellers, either coming or going. Naturally. No one but an idiot like himself would travel if Rossiter's stories were true. There was nothing to alarm a man yet. The road ran through flat ground covered with a close thicket of cistus, bay, and pistachio. The hills were bare of trees. There was no one anywhere in sight, not even a shepherd.

Hades, what a road it was! So typical of Span-

ish occupation. A cart-rut filled with holes and boulders, for the stones had never been removed. Impassible in wet weather, Rossiter had said. No joke now. Lucky his car was a Ford; it rode over obstructions bravely.

Now the bushes gave place to marshy land. Reeds and iris in a sea of green, broken only by a line of oleander trees which masked and traced the course of a stream coming down from the hills. The road became sticky. The car which had rattled so valiantly on over the embedded rocks now skimmed a sea of mud. All speed ahead, lest he sink! At the far side of the mud-hole the front wheel struck a stone, and the hind wheels checked, sank into the mud. Leslie stopped and sprang out. What a business. He could get her out, but it would take time. He threw off his overcoat and coat, got out the shovel, and set to work. He paused once or twice to cast a glance around. Still no one in sight, but from the hills the car must be plainly visible. He strained every muscle, sending the mud flying in rapid shovelfuls, while the exercise under the sun nearing noonday, sent beads of perspiration to his brow. Even so his mind worked faster than his hands, endeavouring to assure him that he was quite safe, not yet in the zone of danger. Yet with such ill-success that a sudden shout brought him to his feet, a hand

reaching for the pistol in his overcoat. He stood thus in suspense until he placed the sound of voices and hurrying hoofs approaching him along the river-bed behind the screen of oleanders. So it had come. He coolly dropped the pistol back into the pocket and swinging the shovel, turned to his work. The voices and hurrying hoofs drew nearer and then with a laugh of relief Leslie recognised the loud cry of a camel-driver. A moment later a small camel-train emerged, lurching out upon the road, attended by three long-legged Arab drivers wielding their sticks. Surprise was mutual. Leslie called a friendly Arab greeting and the men approached. The foremost, a handsome boy with white teeth and an iris stuck in his turban, asked an unintelligible question in a jargon of French, Spanish, and English. Leslie's reply in fluent Arabic drew the two companions.

'American,' Leslie said. 'I go to El Foukara to sell my wares.'

'El Foukara?' The men exchanged glances.

'What are thy wares?' asked he of the iris, peering into the car with sudden suspicion.

Leslie rested and drawing from his pocket the illustrated pamphlet pointed to the photographs of the sewing-machines. The men were like children amused with the pictures till he of the iris had time for a thought.

‘Where is this creature?’

‘Packed securely to keep it from harm on your bad roads,’ Leslie explained smiling, and lifted the corner of the cloth. All suspicion vanished. The men stepped back, calling an admonitory word to the browsing camels and watched his renewed efforts to dislodge the car. Then leaving him in Allah’s hands, they turned away to resume their journey and were soon but a swaying blur upon the distant road.

It was a good hour before Leslie’s efforts had succeeded and the car was on its way again.

CHAPTER XII

ONCE out of the marshy bottom the road grew steadily rougher. The going was slow and the way began to mount between the foothills. According to the map which Leslie had consulted by the roadside, he must soon reach the Spanish post, one of that long line of outposts which hold the Spanish frontier. A mounted patrol keeps the line continuous.

Now off to his right and above, Leslie saw a mounted figure regarding him through field-glasses, a Spanish officer, no doubt. The road here ran through a kind of no-man's-land. When he had passed the blockhouse he would be in Spanish territory and in danger, not of the Spanish, but of the hill-tribes who considered every one in Spanish territory as lawful prey.

The road now wound upward along the side of the hill, with a ravine at the left and hills again beyond. The country had taken on a certain wild picturesqueness. Rounding the brow of the hill, a few hundred yards ahead and above, Leslie saw the roofs of cantonments, and in a moment he had reached the bare plateau which dominated all the country for miles around. The bare brown

earth was broken only by one spreading live-oak which threw its boughs as grateful shade over a group of ragged men. In a second glance Leslie saw that they were soldiers, wearing remnants of uniform on their thin bodies, their feet illy shod with rope-soled *espadrilles* or shoes tied up with rags. They sat with hanging heads, dejected and spiritless. Poor chaps, the appearance of the car had hardly served to arouse them from their apathy.

Leslie came to a halt opposite the men, before a long one-story hut whose faded flag marked it as headquarters. Through a window he could see two men seated opposite each other at a small table on which stood a bottle and glasses. A mangy cur worried a bone on the hard earth before the door, only stopping to snap at a girl who passed carrying a basket of cakes to sell to the soldiers. She had bold eyes and painted lips and her plump black figure moved jerkily on high-heeled shoes. She passed Leslie with a backward smirk over her shoulders at an officer who swaggered out of the building, one of the two who had just been discussing the bottle at the window, and went on to meet the men who, speechless still, but faintly curious, were slouching towards the car. The officer stood in the door, ignoring Leslie, looking after the girl with a sullen frown on his

young face where self-indulgence had set its stamp. Then he turned and spoke to some one within.

In an instant a second officer dashed out in a burst of fury. Neither man took the slightest notice of Leslie who had bowed with a word of greeting. Their whole interest was centred on the ragged group about the cake vendor. A purple flush spread over the older man's face and his eyes looked beyond Leslie at the men and the girl.

'Get back there!' he bawled.

Leslie wondered that such a volume of sound could escape from his tightly corseted figure. The words were accompanied by a string of oaths and a threatening movement of the arm. The girl and the men hesitated, uncertain as to whom he addressed. The instant's indecision added to his fury. 'You, Dolores, I've told you to keep away from the men. Go back to your quarters. And you, sons of the devil, get out! Get out of my sight!'

The girl with a shrug and a vicious scowl turned to the house, while the men returned like whipped curs to the shelter of the tree.

Leslie, hot with indignation, held out his passport. The older man waited to draw a silk handkerchief reeking of scent, before he took the paper.

'That's all right,' he said peevishly in French. 'We've had orders.'

'Which do not include civility to strangers,' Leslie said grimly in Spanish.

The officer walked away with his comrade, muttering an oath in which Americans and English were included.

Leslie started the car, and as he ran on along the plateau he saw that the barracks were empty; the post was lightly held. The troops had been withdrawn. Haunted by the evil of the place, he was glad to leave it behind him. So this was the Spanish zone! He was but half way to El Foukara. He had hoped to have eaten his lunch with Fitzgerald at the end of his journey.

Well, let her rip! It was a run worth the money. On this side the plateau spring was even more advanced and along the roadside ran a riotous band of flowers, scillas of royal blue, flax, pinks, sweet-scented stocks, gentians of the hue of the sky above them, periwinkle, mauve crocus, and delicate irises of varying shades of purple and blue. Off to the right the hills swept away in folds of orange and yellow and amber; hills spread with a carpet of the sacred marigold. It looked, thought Leslie, like some impressionist picture, that bright blue arch above a landscape of orange. He was so absorbed in the wonder of the distant prospect that

he was sorry when the road left open country for a wood, rare in Morocco, of live-oak. The sun filtered through the branches upon the sweet-scented growth of thyme and lavender, of cistus and laurel and rose-bay. In every open copse flowers covered the ground. It was the forest of legend, haunted by djinns, around which Arab story-tellers have woven many a fairy tale. The spell of it fell upon Leslie's spirit, recalling in its beauty and perfume and poetry, the figure of Concha Nicholson. He dreamed of her, he dwelt upon her grace, her charm, her inspired dancing, her varying moods. He called upon her image. He saw her as she had sat, daintily daring, her hands clasped around her knees upon the rock, her back to the great view; he saw her as she knelt, the crown of olive upon her bent head, her hands clasped meekly; he saw her laughing at the danger as she sped ahead of him through the gate; he saw her white and strained, older and more womanly, in the villa courtyard and again cold and distant as she led him through the passage to the garden door; nor could he forget her face as he glimpsed it for a fleeting second ere she let him out. Then there was that moment when she had dashed past him into the engulfing archway, such a little figure swallowed up in such great darkness. The thought gripped his heart. Suppose she were to

vanish like that from his ken forever. No, he must banish that thought. How gentle, yet how firm she had been this morning, all sweetness and yet all strength. How pale and how insipid did all other women in the world seem beside her. The car ran smoothly on. He recalled with scorn the women whom he had once admired. Only such a life, so free, so strange, so wonderful, could have flowered in her, strange and free and wonderful herself. Free? Yes, there was the great charm to him. He was a lover of freedom, of open spaces, of new countries that are old with the wisdom of forgotten peoples. She was of this race of . . .

A shot! Where? Ahead? Behind? The car sprang forward. He must run for it. And then suddenly there came a rush of flying figures through the trees ahead, white turbans, flowing white garments, the glint of silver stirrups, and a band of native horsemen dashed into the road before him, twirling their long thin guns above their heads and brought their fiery little horses to a halt, reined back upon their haunches, held immobile for one dramatic second. The next every man was on the ground and every gun was levelled upon him. It was then that he stopped the car.

CHAPTER XIII

THE men by whom Leslie found himself quickly surrounded were of the tribe of Beni Salam, of hawk-like profile, black hair and eyes, who like all hillmen, bore themselves as kings of the earth.

Their interrogatory was swift, not ill-natured, but peremptory.

‘Spaniard?’

‘No, American.’

‘Where do you go?’

‘To El Foukara, to sell my wares.’

‘What are they?’

He drew forth the pamphlets, pointing to the pictures. These aroused no interest.

‘Come.’

‘Where?’

‘With us. You are our prisoner.’

‘And the car?’

‘You will leave it.’

Leslie laughed, thankful for his Arabic which, though not their dialect, they could understand. He had no doubt but that he could make them see reason.

‘Look here,’ he said. ‘I have much to do in El Foukara. If you will let me go on at once, you shall have much gold, great ransom. If I am late, I am

worth nothing to my august country. You will get little money. Look me in the eyes. I speak the truth. We are all true men.'

But they shook their heads: 'We cannot know. You are our prisoner.'

Leslie, somewhat less secure of his power, turned an uneasy glance upon the car. To leave it like this! Just as Rossiter had suggested as a bare possibility! He had been right. Nowhere could the money be safer than where it was. There would be no travellers. The key of the case was in his pocket; the machine was safe from any chance tampering Moor.

He drew out a cigarette and lighted it. He thought of Concha's warning. Shooting would be of little use here, one man to twenty. The men caught their horses, and mounting, surrounded Leslie, and the cavalcade started up through the wood.

'You have no fear?' one called to him.

'Fear? I speak your language, I know your hearts. I fear nothing,' he replied coldly, his grey eyes gazing fearlessly back.

'How do you know our language?' asked another. 'It is not spoken in your country?'

'I am a servant of my country. I must know many things. Islam is great, I know the tongue of Islam.'

He still had faith in his captors. These were hillmen, brave men, descendants of a race who from their mountain fastnesses, still secure in their ancient virtues, watched the passing of their world upon the plains below. As he tramped between them through the wood and up the rocky ravine, his fancy wandered. What a people these to lead! Below, far-reaching to the barrier of the Atlas, lay gloomy plains, denuded tablelands, dead cities, shattered monuments. Below there was a people wrapped in indifference, a moribund world, a people of phantoms, but here in the hills was vigour, power, courage, faith. He loved these people. He understood them. He had no fear for his life. In spite of Rossiter's stories, he felt that he was master of his fate here as anywhere. If it were not for the larger issues hanging upon his mission, he felt that he could, almost, have welcomed this experience. As it was, he feared delay, nothing more. As to others in like case, he expected that they would give him a more or less uncomfortable time, while they held him for ransom. His only hope of getting off within weary days, would be in Rossiter's instant action. When Rossiter knew, he would salvage the car, and with as little parley as possible, ransom him. But how soon? He thought of all the classic cases in the past. In time to save that dreaded coup in French

Morocco? He plodded on, uphill, tired now under the hot afternoon sun, discouraged at this delay.

A long-drawn, ear-piercing cry told of their approach to a village. Above him on the rocks he saw the white robes of women and children who came running now and leaping down the rocky way to meet them, the women still keening their shrill head cry. The men answered with shouts, and one or two of the younger charged their spirited Barbary mares up the slope, firing their long guns above their heads.

Now the village lodged upon its rocky hillside came in sight, its mud and wattle walls, its palmetto roofs showing amongst feathery tamarisk and the darker green of oak and olive. The huts were pitched anywhere, perched upon the rocky ledges, but one spot of beaten earth beneath the largest tree, and close to the little white-washed mosque, marked what was probably the village place of assembly. It was here that his captors stopped and dismounted. Under the eyes of their women the men assumed a more severe attitude towards him. He was allowed to sit upon a stone, tired from the long pull uphill over rough ground in the heat. He did not like the look of things here quite as much. The old men and the women were evidently hostile to him. They were trying to throw doubt on his story. They laughed at the

men and declared that he was Spanish. The men replied that he was too fair and pointed to his light hair and eyes. They scorned this. Had not Aminah a child as fair as the maize? The men, he saw, grew sulky. Finally one of them approached him and ordered him curtly to come. He rose and followed the man who led him away between the huts. In one, an old woman working at her hand-loom shook her fist and shrieked a curse at him. Outside another, a girl grinding corn in a hand-mill, spat as he passed. 'The female of the species is more deadly than the male.' With the words came the vision of his old red Kiplings upon a shelf within reach of his hand at home. The man stopped before a small, stone, tower-like building, without windows. He opened the heavy door. It was twilight within. Leslie could barely distinguish the pile of litter upon the hard earth floor. He drew himself up.

'What have I done, I of a country friendly to thine, that I should be imprisoned like a dog?'

The man did not answer, but with a magnificent gesture pointed him to enter. Leslie stepped inside. The door closed. He heard the thud of the wooden bar which secured the door outside. He stood for a moment, then sat down upon the floor, his back to the wall.

Well, what next? Here he was in the midst of

just such a story as he had heard from Rossiter. There were various possible endings. He closed his lips tightly.

He sat on for a long time, straining his ears to catch any sounds from without which could give him any clue to his fate. He heard voices raised in anger; he heard the yapping of dogs and the shrill tones of children. Time passed very slowly. He considered the possibility of escape. There seemed to be none. The house was solidly built and there was, without doubt, a sentry outside the door.

Suddenly there were sounds of voices and approaching feet. The bar was raised, the door opened. He saw men outside in the dusk and obeying the command, he arose and stepped out. It was all dark about him, but a bright glow down the hill lit up the roofs of the village and threw a brilliant light up to the tree-tops.

His arms were instantly seized on each side and he was thus led down between the huts to the gathering place under the great tree. It was here that a fire of furze was burning, which lighted the semicircle of men and women. He judged that they were still divided into two camps, by the words which he caught. 'Spaniard! Spy! Let him die!' 'Loose his arms, he is English!' 'Hold him or he will escape!' He smiled at this, seeing himself one to a hundred. The man whom he had

taken for the village head pointed to the stone on which he had sat before.

'You say you are American. Tell us then how you know our language? It is only the Spaniards who would speak Arabic that they may better destroy us.'

Leslie rose: 'I am English-American. I studied your language at our great schools where it is taught. I have been a servant of my country in other lands where it is spoken—in Persia, in Egypt.'

He felt that the chief was on his side. 'You see,' the man said, turning to the crowd, 'he speaks truth.'

But from the other side of the circle an old man spoke: 'We do not know, he speaks fair, but we do not know. We owe our enemies much, we want revenge. If he is not a Spaniard, he is a Christian.'

Before the murmur of approval which ran through the people had died away, an old woman moved into the circle, her face rapt, her body swaying from side to side, her voice raised in a thin wail which increased in volume as she turned slowly round the open space. She kept a kind of weird time to her words and the dance by clapping her cupped hands. Her voice had a hoarse throaty quality that rasped the nerves and stirred the passions. Leslie recognized her as one of those beings gifted with the power of improvisation, of which

nearly every village in Morocco boasts one. As she moved rhythmically swaying, the crowd kept time for her chant.

'We passed happy days
In Medinah,
Oh, the happy valley!

'The maize and the barley fields were green,
Oh, the happy valley!
In the night came the storm,
The rain was of lead and the hail was of steel.
Where now is the happy valley?
Oh, what am I? A wanderer,
Only a poor creature,
For my lord is no more,
Gone forever is the happy valley.'

Thus far she had held her audience rapt by her wailing monotone. Now, suddenly, the rhythm changed, her whole body became tense, her eyes flashed, her face had the tragic look of the prophetess as sweeping the circle with a pointing finger, she cried:

Awake, awake, and take your vengeance.
Blood cries for blood,
And the trampled maize fields
Are red with the blood of
My slain lord.
Revenge!

Her cry was echoed by the high, keening note of the women, a note which excites the men to battle

and to love. They turned upon the chief, leaving Leslie seated upon the stone. He knew that the hostile party was too strong for the friendly chief and, with an incredulous flash, he saw that the end of the story might be death. Death for him in these hills? How ridiculous, what a waste, how unutterably foolish. He started to his feet.

‘Listen, friends,’ he cried. ‘Why do you not send a messenger to the town, to El Foukara, to the man of power, to the Son of the King and he will tell thee if I speak not the truth. He will send money for my ransom, and money buys silks and pearls for the fair and horses and guns for the brave. My lord, I pray thee, send!’

But the old man who had before spoken, raised his voice: ‘What need have we of money? We are not merchants, not dogs of the town, but free men. Revenge we want, not gold!’

His words were drowned in the keening, blood-thirsty cry of the women. Leslie sat down. He knew enough of the psychology of crowds to be convinced of the futility of any further appeal. Besides, he would not beg for his life. He affected an utter indifference as he heard the chief protesting that if he yielded to the demand it was against his own will. It was all but over then.

‘To-morrow, at dawn,’ were the words, the reluctant sentence.

Dazed and still incredulous that such an end should come to him, he was led, hustled now amidst rude jibes, back to the blockhouse. It was dark and the stars were in the sky. He looked up at them with passion. So beautiful a world is this, and, after . . . Who knows?

He found himself in the bare room. Some one had placed a clay lamp on the floor in which a wick burned in the rancid oil. But it served to light his evening meal, a bowl of *kouss-kouss*. It was good. When he had eaten it he felt better and thought of some attempt at escape. Was there a sentry? Could he be bribed? He stood close to the door and spoke in Arabic, but there was no answer. He shook the door; the hinges were solid.

Blankly he realized that there was no escape; that he was face to face with that last night which so many men had envisaged. Still he could not believe it. What? He who had escaped the barrage of the Western front to die by a bullet in these hills? Oh, well, it was a clean place to die. He got out his pen and a piece of paper. There were certain letters to be written, to Rossiter, to his father. Yet, what was there to say? Should they, as was unlikely, ever reach their destination? No, he would spare himself that. He must keep his nerve. He must sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

WAS it hours or minutes later? He started up, leaning on his elbows, straining his ears. Had he dozed or really slept? Had he been dreaming or had he heard a sound? Something had awakened him to this chill of horror. Was it only his own subconscious dread of the morning's doom or was it something from without? The room was dark; he could see nothing. Ah! there it was, the sound that had awakened him. He knew it again. A groan, a gurgling choke outside, there, close to the wall. He sank down again, his forehead damp with dread of the unseen, the unknown. What was happening? What had gone before? Something beyond this sound had come through sleep, but what? And what was coming next?

He lay rigid, every sense concentrated in the one effort of hearing. But there was silence now; not even a friendly night-sound broke the heavy stillness. Then, suddenly, there was a movement, stealthy, almost like a rustling of wings in the night, just a movement. And now . . . a step, almost noiseless, yet a step, coming to the door. And now the bar was raised.

His effort to hear, to keep quiet, was agony.

His eyes, through lowered lids, were fixed upon the door. It swung slowly open and a figure blurring the streak of light had slipped within and the door was closed. He felt that he must shout, must leap to his feet, and meet this ghostly visitant, but, in full command of himself, he lay still feigning sleep.

The light stealthy step came nearer. It was a woman, a veiled figure without form or features; one of those shrilling creatures who had keened for his death, coming to gloat? She was near; she was by his side, bending above him. Her hand was on his shoulder, which he feared in its rigidity must betray to her his wakefulness. Her fingers closed upon his arm lightly, and a woman's voice, the voice he had heard only twice, yet would know forever, whispered, 'Come.'

She had turned, had glided on before him and a moment later he stood beside her in the starlight. Even then he could not see her face, for the veil was drawn across and around her, but he felt the purpose that was in it, as she motioned him ahead. But his step was stayed, his eyes fixed upon a figure dimly discerned, stretched upon the ground at the foot of the tower. With a stride he was at the man's side. It was the guard, his dead face to the stars, a knife still grasped in his stiffening hand. He turned slowly. She stood motion-

less, and there was no pity for the man, only an agony of anxiety in her voice as she motioned, now peremptorily: 'Follow me; not a sound or we are dead — as dead as that dog.'

He felt her like steel; no bending, no weakness. A few paces towards the hillside, and at a blundering step she caught his hand and above the white folds of her veil he saw her eyes. Once again, with his hands in hers, she led him step by step down the rocky hillside, away from the huts of the village, stealthily, noiselessly, toilsomely, inch by inch feeling her way. He saw no path, he knew no direction, but she had eyes that saw in the dark, and instinct that was more than sight. And when, finally, safe away as it seemed, Leslie would have spoken, she still silenced him, shaking her head, her finger on her lips. And so it was that for an hour they made their way between rocks, through cactus and thicket and the pale stalks of asphodel till they stood upon level ground at the foot of the ravine.

There the girl halted, and drawing the silver whistle from her dress, still remote, concentrated, unmindful of him, blew twice softly. The signal was answered below them and to the right. Still without speaking they turned, and following the bed of the dried water-course a hundred yards, met Abdullah who stepped with raised hand from

the bushes. Leslie saw that his usual calm was broken by some unwonted emotion, and judged more justly the danger they had run by the peasant's broken ejaculations of joy and relief. He had fallen on his knees by the girl's side, had seized a fold of her garment which he pressed to his lips before she could stop him. Leslie heard how soft her voice could be as, not without a trace of impatience, she raised the servant, speaking with gentleness and authority, as one speaks to a child.

'We are safe, Abdullah. Thou shalt make a burnt offering and a candle thou shalt buy — a coloured candle, the finest in the *souk*. And, now, the horses. Time presses. The guard may be found, and we may be followed. Yes, thou art faithful. The *kaid* knew thee well. He would be pleased.'

Abdullah straightened himself, and muttering thanks and praise to Allah turned quickly and brought the horses from the bushes. The girl caught Scimitar's bridle and swung herself into the saddle. In that light, in her white *haik* she would have passed for a young hill *sheik*. Leslie mounted the second horse, and they started down the ravine.

'Slowly, there is an echo,' she warned over her shoulder.

Abdullah walked at her side. Leslie lengthened the distance between them a little that he might hold and realise the picture that they made; the slim white boyish figure balanced so lightly upon the white horse, and the grey-bearded figure in the brown jellab walking at her stirrup. It had the simplicity and dignity of a religious painting, some young saint led by a seer going forward through the dark valley to a brighter day.

As they emerged from the valley the girl touched her horse and shot ahead. Leslie, coming back to reality, allowed his own horse to come up with her.

'Where are we? Where are we going?' he demanded.

She did not answer for a moment. Then: 'Is that all you have to say, Mr. Stewart? Is it nothing to be here and free . . . or have I failed as my father's daughter again?'

'Please,' he began.

But shaking her head, she left him behind, riding fast. He had all he could do, not knowing his mount or the country, to keep at her horse's heels.

They were in the live-oak forest now. It was pathless, but the girl rode straight and in a few moments, without a word or a glance, brought him out onto the road, not fifty paces from the derelict motor.

It looked deserted, this thing of noise and cities, standing there in the starlight.

They reined in their horses beside it. For a moment they stood motionless.

‘Well?’ she said coldly.

‘Well,’ he repeated, feeling at a complete disadvantage. ‘I suppose I must get on to El Foukara — if I can.’

She did not answer. Leslie, his heart beating, dismounted. She sat motionless and silent.

He turned to the car; all was as he had left it. Going to the front he cranked it, then came back to her. He was more utterly miserable than he had ever been in his life.

‘You understand?’ he said. ‘You do understand? Of course I cannot thank you, it is impossible.’

‘Oh, that,’ she said contemptuously.

‘What is it?’ he begged. ‘What have I done? Do tell me before I go.’ He held out his hand. ‘Good-bye — and . . .’

Her hand faintly returned his pressure. He gave a gesture of despair — white with the effort of farewell, and turning, jumped into the car. She was sitting there still motionless, but as the car started forward she awakened to life, touched her horse with her heel, and shot into the road before him.

‘Wait!’ she cried. She was on the ground, the bridle thrown to the winds. Scimitar with a snort wheeled out of the road. She was on the running-board. ‘Don’t you see,’ she said. ‘I am coming, too. I must come too.’

Before he could realise the meaning of the words she had slipped into the seat beside him and the car, which had not stopped, was on its way.

CHAPTER XV

THEY spoke not a word. Leslie had accepted her action with a sense of fatality. The game, whatever it was, was being played around him. He felt himself helpless at the moment. Whatever she had in view, whatever mission herself, she alone had helped him to the accomplishment of his. Without her aid he would now, before dawn, be going to his death. Instead, he was here, on his way to El Foukara, with her, incredible fact, by his side. Could he refuse her?

He glanced at her as the car ran out of the scented wood into the ribbon of road through rolling table land. The night wind caught them here, and he fancied that she shivered. He slowed down and stopped. 'You are cold,' he said. He drew his overcoat and the rug from the floor at the back. 'Now then, put on this coat.'

She did not move, but sat still with bowed head.

'Come,' he coaxed. 'Put your arms in. The wind is cold, and you are tired.'

She shook her head. 'You don't understand,' she said.

'Don't understand?' he echoed. 'What?'

'That I am your enemy, really.'

‘That’s all right,’ he declared lightly. ‘You may have all kind of designs upon me, but I shall not consider you as my enemy *really*, till we get to El Foukara. Just now I feel especially friendly because, you see, you’ve saved my life again. It is becoming a habit. Please, put on the coat.’

She rose slowly and her face was grave. ‘I have warned you. You may put it round me. But it does not mean anything.’

‘Nothing in the world,’ he declared. As he folded the ulster about her, she shrank, swaying unsteadily.

‘Hullo, what is it? Are you faint?’

She shook her head, steadying herself against him. She was white. ‘My arm. It’s nothing, only a scratch. Just a minute!’

‘Your arm? Let me see.’

‘It’s nothing,’ she repeated. ‘Nothing.’

He pressed her into her seat, and as she rolled back her sleeve he saw in the dim light her bandaged forearm. As he untied the handkerchief, she gave a sigh of relief.

‘It was too tight,’ she said. .

Leslie did not speak. He was out of the car, and blessing the lunch-basket, held wine to her lips. It was, as she had said, not serious; a flesh wound, but how she had accomplished the night’s task, so handicapped, he did not know. The long

climb down the hill, the ride. 'Nerve, Nicholson's own nerve,' he thought exultantly. He tied the rough bandage with deft fingers. Then wrapped her around with the coat, talking to her all the while.

'Now then, how did it happen?'

'The guard at the tower. Abdullah killed him.'

The reprieve of her words sent a wave of absurd joy flooding over him. He laughed. 'Good old Abdullah! Now, you know, you must eat. It is partly because you have not eaten that you felt faint.'

She smiled. 'I am an Arab in that. I can go a long time without food.'

Triumphantly he produced the provisions, standing by as they both ate.

'You know,' she said. 'We ought to be getting on. That is, I suppose you ought. We both ought.'

He tossed the basket back into the car. 'Nice conspirators we are! Forgetting everything for a sandwich.' He was back in the driving seat. Again the Ford leapt forward.

He looked aside at her. Her veil was drawn across her face.

'I'm frightfully sorry, I'm afraid this jolting hurts you. If I drive slowly we shall never arrive.'

She nodded assent, wrapped away from him in some remoteness that seemed to steal upon her

from the plains, the *bled* where her ancestors had roamed. He wondered if she felt the monotony, the dreariness, the sense of futility, of being adrift and lost, which always took possession of him in these wide solitudes. The feeling grew upon him, waxing to an intolerable loneliness. Here in the vastness of plain and sky he felt utterly depressed, felt that sense of shrinking to a pin-point in the universe, which appalls. The car, their speed, themselves, seemed unreal; their presence meaningless.

He roused himself with a shake; he was very tired. 'It's lonely, horribly lonely, all this,' he said aloud.

'They say,' she answered, 'that here the old times come back by night. The *bled* is haunted, full of things, of ghosts; the old people — they are here. It is that, not emptiness. You do not know, because you are English.'

'But you are English.'

'I am nothing.' She shook the *haik* back from her head. 'I am nothing because I am everything. I am English because I am his daughter, but I am of the hills and of the plains, and always I am Spanish. You hear?' Her voice was defiant.

He laughed. 'And I say, that in all that counts, you are English. Girls are like their fathers. You are like him. No Spanish girl could do what you

have done to-night. No Spanish girl could do what you are doing now. You are English, clean through.'

She turned a white and angry face upon him. 'How dare you say that to me! How dare you! And if I have disgraced my Spanish blood, if I have done what no Spanish woman would ever do — did I not do it for you?'

He met her eyes straight. 'Because you are English. Because I am English,' he insisted.

Tears came to her eyes, but she shook them away. 'English!' she cried in a tempest of scorn. 'I hate England. I hate the English. Do you hear? As they hate me. How have they treated me? What have they not said of me? What wickedness have they not believed? I hate them. I am Spanish, Spanish, I tell you. Spain is my country.'

She was trembling.

'Oh, my dear girl,' he cried. 'I am sorry if I've offended you. I did not mean to. You see, your father, the Kaid Nicholson, was one of my heroes, is still; and so . . .'

'Don't, don't!' The words seemed wrung from the girl. 'Don't!'

He stopped, moved by her pain, pitiful of her sorrow, uneasy at the cause. Was her father's name a reproach in her ears? What had she done?

What was she doing? Such pain could only come from the ulceration of a deep wound. He longed to help her, to comfort and help her. Yes, Nicholson's daughter, he feared, had set her feet in a strange path. Yet, could any path of adventure be strange to Nicholson's daughter? For the soldier of fortune, glory, and gold, and waving banners. For the daughter, for the woman who dares, to whom adventure beckons along the same wild ways, the damning title of adventuress? His face grew grim with the twist that word gave his heart. What did he know of her? What did he know! He knew *her*. He drew a long breath and glanced at his companion. She turned and met his eyes with something of dignity, of appeal.

'Some day,' she said, 'when things are different, I want to hear you speak of my father. To-night,' she shivered, 'I couldn't bear it.'

'That's all right,' he said kindly. 'There will be plenty of time to talk, I hope, before we are through.'

'Will there?' she sighed. 'I wonder. Sometimes I am afraid. Oh, look!'

The pale road which had led for miles across the empty spaces of the *bled* wound ahead through low hills whose warm dark masses were touched to a rim of radiance above by the light of the rising moon. In another moment the moon had risen and

poured its magic over the world, turning dimness to fair planes of glory spaced by shadows deeper and more mysterious, yet more clear, than any seen by day. Bushes appeared cut out of velvet where none had been, and a tiny domed Khoubā, the shrine of some dead saint, shone white upon a rise of ground to the right, where before it had stood unseen. And Leslie, a moon-lover, turning to meet comprehension in her eyes, found the moon-wonder repeated for him in the pale face shadowed by the black hair under the pale veil. For a moment she was neither English nor Spanish, but an incarnation of the white glory of the Eastern night.

CHAPTER XVI

IN the narrow valley between the foothills the moon was still hidden. Leslie, uneasy now that they had left the open, yet knew that they must be nearing their journey's end. Rossiter had described to him this very piece of the road, and had said that beyond this valley he would join the main road from El Foukara to the Atlas, one of the great trade routes of old days from the sea to Southern Morocco. And there, Rossiter had said, he would be safe. Off to the left El Foukara would be in sight, white upon its hill, backed by the towering rocky peaks of the Riffian hills.

He quickened the pace, driving the little car to its utmost, alert for any sign of disturbance ahead, glancing now to one side, now to the other for the sudden appearance of such a winged band as had stopped him in the wood. But the valley was quiet; not a sound broke the stillness in all its length, and with a sigh of relief Leslie saw before him the valley's end in the open country. There he would in a moment strike the high road, and turning leftward, within half an hour enter the gates of the city.

He had hardly won this moment's security,

when the girl at his side started erect. The sound that had startled her, reached him. The unmistakable sound of marching feet, of troops marching in the night.

He put on the brake, and stopped the car as the head of a column came in sight, marching at right angles to him. In an instant he would be plainly in view. Spanish troops marching south!

The girl's hand was on the wheel. 'Drive on,' she urged. 'Drive on, leave it to me.'

As the car ran out from the shadow of the valley into the full moonlight, Concha threw back her hood, leaning forward.

The officer, a mere boy, at the head of the column ran forward, waving his sword. 'Halt!' he commanded.

The car came to a standstill. The column continued its march. The officer was at their side. 'Your papers.'

'No, no,' Concha broke in swiftly in Spanish with an air of authority. 'The car is mine. Where is your superior, the Duke? He is in command to-night? Has he already passed?'

Evidently relieved, the boy saluted with respect. 'He comes at the head of the next battalion, Señora. In but a moment he will pass.'

'Are we in the way?' she smiled divinely. 'Shall I ask my chauffeur to back the car a little?'

‘Not at all, Señora.’ The boy was deeply thrilled at this meeting with the lady of whom he had heard. ‘It will give the men new courage to see the face of a Spanish lady — and such a face!’ he added with the Spaniard’s irrepressible temptation to compliment.

‘Nice boy,’ she said laughing, in English. ‘Ah, the column.’

She sat quite still, but Leslie felt the tension of the moment as the mounted officer at the head of the second battalion suddenly saw the car, and recognised its occupant. In an instant he had given a swift command, which halted the men, and had spurred his horse to her side.

Leslie, holding the wheel with as nonchalant a countenance as he could manage, admitted reluctantly to himself both the grace and distinction of this young man who with a swift movement had dismounted, and with his arm through his bridle, stood bowing to the girl at his side.

Concha sprang quickly out. ‘Tino!’

Leslie saw her eager hand outstretched and kissed. He heard the voices familiar, gay, questioning, answering, and suddenly awake to his own love for her recognised passion in this man’s deep tones. And she was moved, unmistakably moved. Now they walked a few steps away, and the tones changed. The Duke motioned to the

car, spoke of him, and Concha answered with a contemptuous wave of her hand, which sent the hot blood to Leslie's face. What were they saying now? The Spanish was swift as it was beautiful. Ah, he knew! She commanded the Duke's return to El Foukara. He caught in the rise and fall of her voice, a passionate entreaty, an eloquent appeal, which were met by swift challenge, direct question. She was silent. Leslie, sitting at the wheel, grew colder as he recognised that the proofs of the menace to El Foukara, to Spain's power in Morocco, were proofs which would send a bullet through his head.

Now her hand was on the Duke's arm; she still entreated. But he, laughing low, shook it off, and turned to mount his horse. The words of his parting reached Leslie's ears.

'As you have no proof beyond rumour I must go on. All is quiet in El Foukara. They only await me in Fez to attack, and . . . French Morocco is ours.' He swung himself up, wheeled back to his company, his hand raised in salute.

Concha stood as one dazed, watching the men march by. Then she turned to the car, and climbed in. She sank down into her seat. 'Drive on,' she said.

There was such pain in her voice that he forgot his own piqued unhappiness.

‘Your arm?’ he said.

‘My arm!’ she burst out furiously. ‘My arm! I had forgotten my arm! Drive on, please. Drive on.’

Releasing the clutch Leslie turned the car into the road to El Foukara. Already the dawn was silvering the East behind the Riffian hills. Now indeed, his goal was almost reached, yet he felt no high elation, for somewhere, soon, he knew that he must leave her. Those troops upon the road, the words he had heard — every moment was precious. Suppose he had come too late! Too late to save that gallant band of Frenchmen, that handful of brave men, who were holding Morocco of the South against the whole dark race.

‘We are nearly there,’ he said, rousing himself.

The road ahead was empty. She sat up, drawing her *haik* about her.

‘Stop, please. Put me down here. You must go on alone.’

‘How can I?’ he cried. ‘What am I to think? What can I think?’

She shrugged slightly, rising. ‘How should I know an Englishman’s thoughts.’

She was out of the motor. Her voice was stifled, her face hidden in the folds of her *haik*. ‘Good-bye. If I’ve hurt you, I’ve at least helped you on your way.’ She moved back with a gesture of finality.

Desperate, he leaned towards her. 'Not good-bye. We shall meet? Say that we shall meet.'

But already she was moving off, and he heard the Arabic words, the text of fatalism, like a sigh from her lips: '*Ma shà Allah!*' As God wills.

Once more he started the car forward, blind to the glory of El Foukara, that city of fountains gathering colour now with every instant's growing light. He did not see the road, nor the orange gardens to right and left, nor the early sun striking the Anjera hills; he saw only the face of Concha Nicholson, wet with tears.

CHAPTER XVII

As Leslie drew up to the great archway, the rose-coloured arch, the perfect horseshoe, sung in Moorish verse, he saw that the gates were closed. The Spanish sentries came sleepily out from their boxes, muskets in hand. He was producing his papers, but they waved them rudely aside. No one could enter the town before sunrise. He could see the sun was not yet up. He must wait. They popped back into their boxes.

Furious at this last delay, which, however, he might have foreseen, he settled down in his seat to wait with what patience he could command. Already coming up the road behind him were groups of country folk, peasants with their donkeys, bringing in the produce of their fields and gardens to the early market. He had no doubt that Concha was somewhere in that throng. She would pass through the gate with the Riffs, a hill-woman herself. What a crowded life she led, three women in one. He tried to remember her as the English girl of their first meeting, to place her in English surroundings, to see her in his home in the west country. Dismayed, he found that he could not see her there. In Ispahan, perhaps. Yet a

consul's wife slipping from the house in native dress; a dancing girl? When he tried to tell himself that this was not the real Concha, but a masquerading of the true woman, conviction failed him. Still, if he could make her love him? If she loved him he could believe that she would rise to great heights, to any sacrifice. Love him? There was the Spaniard — the Duke —

He rested his head upon his hands holding the wheel, trying to bring some order out of the chaos of his thoughts. She had said that they were enemies; yet she had not betrayed him. He groaned with weariness, too tired to try further to unravel the problem, when the opening of the gate aroused him.

He sat up; the sun had risen, the gates were open; the yawning sentries, glancing at his papers, waved him in.

Entering with him, as the car slowly moved forward, were the crowd of peasants, wrapped in the black-and-white striped jellab of the district; among them no white-veiled woman of the towns. Yet he knew that she was here.

He followed the plan arranged with Rossiter, and drove slowly to the Place de l'Espagne where an ugly rococo fountain held the centre of a formal grass-plot, surrounded by circling asphalt paths under the shade of spindling plane trees. A

Spanish lounge or two already occupied the green iron benches here, and a Spanish woman was opening the wooden shutters of a kiosk, full of Spanish books and postcards.

Leslie gave hardly a glance to the square, in his weariness, but stopped the car before the door of the Hotel Alfonso XII. A sleepy porter came out and answered him civilly enough in French as Leslie, descending, ordered him to bring in his luggage.

He entered the hall and arranged with the clerk at the desk for a room explaining, as he signed the register, that he would want the room only as long as he found business good in the city.

The clerk was interested. 'What business?'

'I am an agent for an American sewing-machine. I believe that there is a large native population here, if I can get at them.'

'That's the trouble,' the clerk agreed. 'It's the women who buy such things.'

'I am told that the English Consul here can help me. That there are a good many Moors under English protection.'

'Too many,' the clerk declared brusquely.

Leslie followed his luggage to his room, an apartment where no water ran in the stationary basin, and where a blight of dust and neglect seemed to have fallen upon the modern furniture and fittings. With a longing eye at the bed he

unlocked the machine case. The notes were safe. He took the precious bundle out, ten of them, a thousand pounds in each, and slipped them into the inner pocket of his coat. Then locking the case again he went downstairs.

‘Breakfast?’ the clerk enquired sulkily.

‘Thanks, no, I shall get coffee in the town, and have a look around.’

He stepped into the square. Already the sun was hot, though a gusty wind drove eddies of dust along the curb.

Now to find his way quickly to Fitzgerald’s house in the native quarter. He crossed the square, meeting one or two Spanish orderlies busy upon their early morning duties, and followed the street, half Spanish, half Moorish, which was the connecting link between conqueror and conquered. It was a street of provision shops, and pastry shops, of tobacconists, and of shops displaying cheap feminine finery. A few Moors of the poorer class and one or two Spanish women with baskets on their arms were already astir.

This was not yet the beautiful city of fable, El Foukara, the home of the Andalusian Moors, of the aristocrats who, driven from their Spanish paradise five hundred years before, retired here to build again a city with that taste which had given Spain the Alhambra. /

Impatient, Leslie hastened now, and turning to the left through an arch, found himself in the Moorish town, the quarter of the *souks* and cafés with their trellised spaces and arcaded streets.

He stopped before a *ûsa*, a café of the better class, where the proprietor gave him a cordial greeting in return for his Arabic salutation. 'I have just arrived. I want a guide to the house of the English Consul.'

The man bowed; 'The Son of the King.' He bowed again, and calling a lad from the back of the café, with much insistence he confided Leslie to his care. In a moment the two had plunged into the intricate covered streets of the prosperous residential quarter. Here, through street after street, dimly lighted, between blank walls and ample doorways, quiet, almost deserted at this hour, Leslie followed his guide who finally stopped before a door like many of the others, of massive oak, thickly studded with iron nail-heads. He lifted the heavy iron knocker and dropped it with a thud that reverberated down the empty street. The boy then vanished. Leslie waited, but as no one came, he lifted the knocker again. In a moment there was a sound of footsteps, and a man's voice shouted in Arabic: 'Who's there, and what do you want?'

'Hullo, Fitzgerald!'

With the English words bolts were withdrawn, and the door slowly opened, and disclosed Gerald Fitzgerald in striped pyjamas, just within. He looked somewhat wild, his long black hair on end, his face still unshaven, but there was unmistakable relief in his tone in spite of his mocking manner.

‘Hullo yourself! Jolly time to call on a busy man. Come in. And where do you fall from? Excuse formality. Live alone. Can’t trust any one these days. Servant shot last week. Good boy. Well, come along up. I live on the first floor. Oh, but you know the ways of this bally country. You are doing the same silly job in Persia.’

He was leading the way through the central well of the little house, out of which the kitchen opened, and up the stairs.

‘You have had breakfast? No? Well, my cook comes at eight, but we’ll heat some coffee at once. Here you see me, barricaded, eh? No privacy in these houses. Can’t get away from enemies or friends. Gettin’ on my nerves a bit, you know.’

Leslie took in the situation at a glance. The house was a small one, and had on the first floor only two shallow apartments, opening with large carved and coloured doors on the gallery where, standing now leaning on the balustrade, he looked up to the sky and down to the round well-head in

the patio below, across which they had come to reach the stairs. The doors of one of the apartments stood open, offering the usual Eastern room to view, with its carpets and its long cushioned divan against the arabesqued wall hangings.

But the other — 'Looks grim, eh?' Fitzgerald laughed. 'Anyway, whether they know it or not, I can put up a fight, and I rather think they know it. They won't come snooping in here without thinking about it. If you don't mind waiting, I'll get the doors open in a minute.' He squeezed through the crack between the doors into the room, and his words were accompanied by the sound of shoving and the thud of heavy bodies.

'No, you can't help. This is my Sandow exercise. Hear that? It's a dumb-bell exercise with my suitcases. That's my trunk, and that's another. That's my book box; I have to keep my books in it. That's a chest of drawers. And that's all.'

The doors opened, disclosing a scene of wild disorder, of bedclothes and cushions and trunks and furniture and in the centre of the chaos Fitzgerald himself, coolly lighting a cigarette.

'I am afraid it's beastly cold here. Usually have a stove in the place, but only the boy knew how to run the bally thing, and he's dead. Lucky you've got an overcoat on. Well, light that spirit-

lamp, like a good fellow. I put it upon that shelf to keep it safe. I'll be with you in a jiff.'

'But, see here,' Leslie cried.

'All right. I know that it's important. I know that, but a plunge is the only thing for me. I've got a bath rigged up downstairs. I give you my word, I am stale after these nights. No air.'

He seized his clothes from the chaos, and plunged out of the room and down the stairs.

Leslie lighted the spirit-lamp, and put on the brass coffee-pot. Then he turned to look about him. Poor Fitzgerald, what a mess! Couldn't help him straighten things out, didn't know where anything went. An odd mixture of belongings. Home photographs pinned to the wall — jolly nice old house, and people on the lawn. He moved a step further and stopped short before a picture of Concha Nicholson. There was no mistaking the fine pride of that little head. Cut from some picture paper. He gazed and gazed, a great ache at his heart.

From below came sounds of splashing and singing and puffing, slapping and blowing, with shouts in Arabic to the cook who had arrived, to hurry up breakfast. As Fitzgerald came charging up the stairs, whistling, Leslie moved away and was swept with the coffee across to the empty room, where they both subsided on the divan.

Fitzgerald was suddenly quiet, grim, attentive. 'Let's have it. What's up?'

'Only that I bring you full powers from the F.O. to act at your discretion, and £50,000 from friends. Your message got through. That's the answer.'

Fitzgerald leaned forward; his big head dropped in his hands, and cursed long and soft and slow.

'Yes, they take no notice of my warnings for one whole year. Then I suppose one word from the French added to my last message, and they send you at the risk of your life with powers, which I don't need. Oh, the money will help, if it's not too late. God, how it would have helped! You came overland? Then your being here to-day is a miracle. I don't know how you did it.'

Leslie rose, walked across the court, and stopped before the picture. He tapped it.

'She helped me,' he said.

'Helped you? God!' Fitzgerald cried, in absolute amazement. 'But she is the brains of the Spanish cause.'

CHAPTER XVIII

LESLIE heard the words with no surprise. Something like this he had surmised though he had refused to believe.

‘Where’d you get the picture?’ His lips were dry. ‘I didn’t know that she was a — public character.’

‘Oh, that. Cut it out of an English paper, the “Tatler.” Rotten society nonsense. Moorish heiress, daughter of British hero — you know the stuff. I cut it out two years ago because I admired the face. It was before she took to this amateur intriguing. You know who she is?’

Leslie nodded. ‘Rossiter told me.’

Fitzgerald eyed him keenly.

‘Where’d you come across her? Not at Rossiter’s surely?’

Leslie hesitated. Should he tell Fitzgerald the story? He decided to make a clean breast of it.

‘I’ll tell you, Fitzgerald. Perhaps I should have told Rossiter, but — dash it — somehow I couldn’t.’

‘Why? Pipped, my son? Not the first, but I will say one thing for her, that she does not care a hang for any one . . . in that way. It’s the danger that she loves, the danger and the glory.’

The Spanish Army adores her. But let's have the story.'

Leslie began with his walk to the olive grove, described the meeting, the lunch under the trees, with reservations, the shots, the flight, the villa, his return to the town.

Fitzgerald snorted. 'That villa! I knew it. It's close to the coast, to the caves of Hercules. We know that the Germans have a submarine base there somewhere. An underground passage. You did not stumble over the petrol tins?'

'Petrol?'

'You did not think it odd, I suppose, that a holiday villa should be provided with a convenient subterranean passage? To play hide-and-seek in, I suppose? Go on. But wait a moment. She was prepared for your coming. Their spies are everywhere, even in the F.O. Well, next?'

Leslie went on with his story of the dancing at the café. Fitzgerald was aghast.

'It's a damned shame,' he declared. 'Why doesn't some one stop her? She doesn't know what she is doing. Nicholson's daughter! The Kaid's daughter!'

'She's dancing,' Leslie replied shortly. 'She's absolutely independent, and doesn't care for any one. Why should she? You know the kind of narrow-minded silly old maids in the Colony, and

the things that they say. Why should she care? Why shouldn't she dance? No one knew who she was. And she can dance! I'm all for freedom.'

Fitzgerald waved a hand. 'That's all right. Fire ahead. Even the Vestals danced. All the same, she's a lady and young, and she's got a brain. It's a pity.' |

Leslie found the relation of the story more difficult than he had expected. 'You see,' he went on rather haltingly, 'she tried to stop my coming, and then, when she found she couldn't, she followed me; she and the servant Abdullah. They came on the car in the wood, and she knew what had happened. She could have taken the car on herself, and left me. Or she could have ridden on. But, instead. . . . But I say, I do hate to tell you all this. It seems like giving her away.'

'Oh, never mind me,' Fitzgerald growled. 'I'm like a tomb. No one to tell anything to anyway. Well, she found the motor. Meanwhile, you are still in the hill-village. They were not for letting you off alive, if I know the Anjera Hills to-day. She saved you, I suppose.'

'Yes,' Leslie confessed. 'Got me out of the tower where they had shut me up; going to kill me at dawn. She got wounded herself, slash on the forearm. Led me down, pitch dark, awful hill, back to the motor.'

'And then?'

'She came on with me.'

'Came on with you?'

'What the devil could I do? What would you have done? She told me she was my enemy, and we said we'd call it off till we got to El Foukara. Well, when we reached the high road we ran into the Spanish troops marching south. I tell you, I had the wind up. But she took things in her own hands, called for the officer in command.'

'The Duke D'Alves.'

'Yes, the Duke. . . .'

'They were brought up together. He's in love with her, by the way. Well?'

'Never gave me away. Played the game, though to her own disadvantage. She couldn't turn him back. She has information of whatever is up, but proofs she wouldn't give him. And he went south.'

'And Concha?'

'Left me outside the gate.'

'So she's here. At headquarters by this time. Well, we shall see what we shall see. The troops will be recalled or my old men were not Kings of Athlone. Well, you couldn't help it.'

'Help it!' Leslie cried. 'But it's what we want, isn't it? To turn them back — to save French Morocco?'

Fitzgerald rose, a fanatic light in his eyes.

'I'm after more than that,' he said. 'Save French Morocco, yes. But wrest Morocco from the Spanish as well. What do they want with Morocco? Does Alfonso think to play the Kaiser, to use his young men for gun fodder? Or is it for the benefit of the unscrupulous who make a war to win a stripe or build a fortune? Or are they merely fanatics who wage a war of the Cross against the Crescent? Breakfast, Stewart. Well, luck was with you, my lad. I'd have pretty well given my life for such a romance at your age. Twenty-seven, or twenty-eight, is it? And the girl is twenty.'

CHAPTER XIX

OVER the coffee and rolls of their breakfast Fitzgerald talked — talked — talked —

‘You see, the Spaniards have thought up to now that they had it all their own way here. This town is nominally neutral, but the feeling of what foreign population there is, is pro-German. The Spaniards have not dared to come to open rupture with me; our gunboats still inspire respect. They have not openly insulted me, but there has been a very narrow margin at times. Everything that can annoy has been done, intangible things, some of them, and this week they killed my servant. They call it an affray, of course. The Spanish judge was perfectly polite, suave, and apologetic. Evidence was all in order, plenty of witnesses. But I know that they lied and they know that I know it.’ He stopped, his grey eyes ablaze. ‘Stabbed him in the back. Good boy. Fond of me. Had flowers on the table. I like flowers. Oh, God! I’m doin’ some talkin’! Well, that’s that!’ He ran his fingers through his thick hair. Then began again.

‘Of course, it isn’t all the war. They know that I know them too well. I’ve seen too much here

and they'd like me out of the way. They've taken a suicidal course with the Moors ever since the first day of their occupation. What did they do? What didn't they do! Destroyed the gardens, cut down the orange groves, closed down the potteries, demolished the country houses of the richer Moors, spread ruin everywhere. All, apparently, from a wanton will to destroy.

'What was the result? Fresh resentment added to the deep undying racial hatred of the Moor for the Spaniard. And more than that, a superb and utter contempt. The Spaniards cut down the orange groves and now import oranges from Spain. They closed down the potteries and import cheap tiles from Spain. The Moor understands it all and hates and despises them accordingly.

'He despises their lack of refinement, lack of taste. No Moor will buy their garish tiles. They get them overland from Fez in the cool colours that they love, blues and greens, black and white.'

Fitzgerald leaned nearer, emphasising every word with his knife upon the table, 'Think of it! The Moors of El Foukara, the proudest aristocrats, subjected to every indignity, at the hands of these slimy little devils.'

Again his fingers ran through his hair. 'And because the Moors have kept quiet, kept their imperturbable dignity, have submitted to their

absurd laws and impositions, the Spaniards have thought that all was well.

‘More coffee? Cigarette? No; the Spaniards are stupid. They have no more insight into the soul of other nations than the Germans. In this false security they have been withdrawing their troops from the garrison here. They are playing the ostrich. I cannot think how they can be such fools. Apparently they think because they march their regiments out at night that no one in the town will know that they have gone and that no one, least of all so negligible a person as myself, will know where they have gone and why. Of course they are banking on the certainty that the Allies are so hard pushed on the Western front that no help can be spared for French Morocco.

‘They believe that they have got the game in their hands. They think that the Moors in El Foukara are trodden into passive submission. They dream of an Empire in Morocco from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Atlas — they have long dreamt of it — and now, they believe that their moment has come to strike, to make their dream a reality.

‘Stewart, I’ve known for months what they were up to. For months I have warned the F.O. Have they taken any notice, any notice beyond their damned official chits? No, I’ve been here

alone, without a friend to speak to — without a friend? I mean without an Englishman, without a European. I have friends; good friends amongst the Moors. They trust me. They trust England, in spite of our chicanery. Yes, they believe in us. And I have seen my chance. I have seen the only way to stop German machinations, to recall the troops from French Morocco, was a rebellion here. It is obviously the counterstroke. But it must be on so large a scale, so successful a rising of the whole town that it will take all their strength, every man jack of them, to quell it — if they do!’

He leaned back in his chair with a deep breath. ‘The plans are made. All is ready. The Moors of the town rise to right their wrongs, to avenge themselves, and for the first time they submit to the leadership of a hillman. I have done that. It has not been easy. Jealousies, pettiness. But this young chieftain is a leader, a great leader. The future of his race may lie in him.’

‘You say that all is ready. Do you mean that any date is fixed?’ Leslie asked.

Fitzgerald shrugged. ‘The Duke’s going has left a handful of men. I think it must be soon. The success of the attack depends on the absence of the regiments. If Concha Nicholson is at headquarters, they will be recalled. Of that I am certain.’

Stewart laughed nervously, 'You don't think that you exaggerate her power?'

Fitzgerald looked at him. 'No, do you?'

'Hardly,' Leslie granted grudgingly.

'You don't mind me talking. I haven't spoken English for months. I have been pretty nearly off my head at times. We are all mad, the men who do this work. Dotted all over the world and all dotty. Englishmen holding these outposts, putting our life into the work, learning to know the native, learning the language — not a Spaniard in the place speaks Arabic — trying to stand for something decent — and doing it alone. That's where the strain comes. You know that you are alone, that though you may see the importance of some special move, no one is going to back you up at home.'

'You know, yourself, how it is, Stewart.' Leslie nodded. 'Oh, the Moors are a fine race. The best of us must appear detestable to them, even when our curiosity is made up of sympathy and a desire to understand. When it's a case of these Spanish — oh, hell —'

'That boy, you know. He was a charming boy. I can't forgive 'em that. Why didn't they go for me? Not a bit of it, the cowards. Catch my servant in a back street and do him in — swine!'

He rose abruptly, moving restlessly up and down, his hands in his pockets. Leslie saw that the man's nerves were all to pieces, that he had lived too long alone and under too great a strain. That the sudden appearance of a friend, of some one to whom he could talk was too much for him. He acted accordingly.

'Well, Fitzgerald,' he said, rising, 'I'm dead tired. No good till I've had a bath and a sleep. I'd better get back to the hotel.'

His host stopped short, his face lost its tensivity. 'Good Heavens, what a blighter I am. Don't go back. You'll stop with me. Of course you'll stop with me. Have a bath and a sleep. The old woman shall make your bed. You'll be quite comfortable. I say, you must be tired. What an egoist I have become.'

Taken out of himself by Stewart's needs, he called to the woman, adjuring her in the most flowery terms of Moorish compliment to hasten and prepare a bed for the guest. He brought out of the chaos of his bedroom bath-towels of vast size, and busied himself for Stewart's comfort, forgetful of all else for the moment. It was not until he had seen Leslie into the bathroom that he announced that he was leaving for the office.

'Not that there is any work. There isn't. But

I am there just the same. I'll be back for lunch. Make yourself comfortable. The house is yours.'

When Leslie awoke some hours later, he lay still for a moment, confused, unable to recognise his surroundings — the blue ceiling sprinkled with stars, the rich arabesques of the wall hangings — or the figure in a white jellab, which sat motionless upon the divan near him.

'Hello there,' Fitzgerald cried, springing up as he saw Leslie's eyes upon him, 'I thought you'd never waken. I've had a morning. Things are moving. Tell you later. Hurry up. Dress now. Food, and then — ' He started from the room, stood for a moment, his tall spare figure dark against the light of the courtyard, and then turned back with a certain gentleness in his tone and manner.

'You know, Stewart, your mission is ended. You have only to push on to Ceuta to get a boat over to Gib and home. This is not your affair, my boy. A safe-conduct from me will place you in safety before the trouble begins. There is no obligation upon you in any way.'

Leslie returned the older man's grave gaze and shook his head. 'The safe-conduct will keep. I'm with you. I, too, have an interest in this affair. My clothes —'

‘Won’t want ’em,’ Fitz’s voice was gruff. ‘Native dress. There, on the divan. Case you’d stop. Wait for you below.’ He turned and vanished down the stair. In a moment Leslie heard him happily humming his old Irish tune. ,

CHAPTER XX

BREAKFAST was not over at Spanish Headquarters that morning when an orderly entered and saluted. A native woman stood without, demanding an audience with General Miguel.

Where was she from? What name did she give? What was her business?

She would answer no questions unless to the General himself.

The General cast an anxious glance around the table, picking up advice. His staff encouraged him by smiles, by nods.

‘Shall we have her in, gentlemen?’

‘As your Excellency thinks best,’ the polite replies were murmured.

They were versed in the art of making the General’s decisions and allowing him to think they were his own.

The orderly appeared at the door followed by a veiled figure who, with her face covered, addressed the General in Arabic.

‘Speak Spanish,’ he cried roughly. ‘We don’t understand your heathen tongue.’

‘You’ve always pretended that you did,’ said a cold voice in pure Spanish, and dropping her veil

Concha Nicholson stood before them. The staff sprang to its feet as one man. The General sat still, fat and offended. He was trying to explain.

‘The Señorita knows that I understand Arabic. It was to a native woman that I spoke. The natives should learn Spanish.’

‘Of course, my General,’ Concha agreed, taking the seat at his right hand. ‘Don’t apologise. Don’t explain. But will some one give me coffee, and some one give me bread and butter? I have been through adventures, such adventures.’ She sighed, her chin in the air, looking from one to another around the table. A poor lot with which to build the glory of Spain, always excepting D’Astorga and the boy Cortés. And into her mind there came the face of Leslie Stewart, and into her ears the sound of his words, ‘In every thing that counts you’re English.’ Supposing she had been mistaken these last years! The glory of Spain in that purposeless figure at her side? She threw up her head and turned her eyes to the fine young face of the boy. She smiled at him. D’Astorga answered for him with his own delightful humorous twist.

‘Ah, Señorita, Cortés has not eaten or slept since you left us.’

The boy coloured, and they all laughed.

‘And no one asks me why I am here,’ Concha

cried. 'Here have I come through incredible hair-breadth escapes, and no one says a word. And yet,' she leaned forward speaking incisively, 'I have important information! May I speak, General?'

The General puffed importantly. 'Si, Señorita, si.'

She leant forward addressing the table rather than the commanding officer, addressing herself to intelligence rather than to authority. A mistake.

'From London I have the assurance that the Moors of El Foukara are on the verge of an insurrection.'

The General laughed. 'And the Señorita comes through great dangers, she says herself great dangers' — he paused — 'to tell us this canard from London.' His shrug of incredulity ran around the table, but stopped at D'Astorga.

He bowed to the girl who had flushed at the insolence of the General's words and manner.

'The daughter of the *kaid* has never failed us yet,' he said courteously. 'Your Excellency knows of what value her aid has been. She alone has known the natives, the language — ah, yes, I know that we all speak Arabic, but not as the Señorita speaks it. She has averted disaster more than once.'

'Through information from the natives,' growled

the General. 'That is different. Who knows? This story from London may be a ruse of the Allies to recall our troops from Fez.'

The girl was vivid. 'It is not,' she cried to D'Astorga. 'It is not. We have emptied the garrisons here, everywhere, in a false security. El Foukara is in danger. There is a plot and they have us at their mercy!'

The General cleared his throat, picking up the opinions of his staff by a hasty glance. The prevailing expression was derisive. A long habit of contempt for the native had bred a false security. D'Astorga alone gave him back in his grave glance a moment's pause.

The General spoke with a clumsy attempt at lightness. 'And what would you have us do to meet this — er — rising? El Foukara is peaceful, the natives go about as usual.'

'Recall the troops.' The girl's voice was clear, unfaltering. 'Send a messenger to D'Alves. Recall the regiments.'

D'Astorga's grave, measured tones repeated her words: 'Your Excellency, recall the regiments.'

'And miss the coup in Fez!' Cortés's boyish voice rang out, keen with protest.

'To miss the coup in Fez is to postpone for a day our further empire in Morocco,' D'Astorga spoke urgently. 'To win our coup in Fez and to lose

El Foukara is to lose our Empire in Morocco. What is Fez without El Foukara? I beg you to recall the regiments, sir.'

But the General was peevish. He had drunk too much the night before. His head ached, he could not make so momentous a decision. His gaze vacillated from D'Astorga to his evil genius who, with hardly moving lips, murmured 'proofs.'

The General pushed back his chair.

'We have no proofs of any trouble. Have you proofs, my beautiful Señorita?'

His tone was bantering. 'Would you have me recall the regiments on a mere rumour from London?'

'Yes,' she cried passionately. 'I would. Oh, your Excellency, be on the safe side. What is our handful of men here against a city full? Think of the English in India — the mutiny —'

He shook his head heavily. 'Proofs, I want proofs.'

She hesitated, while Leslie's face rose before her eyes once again.

'No,' she said slowly. 'I have no proofs.'

She bowed with a little gesture of finality. 'With your permission, Excellency — I am very tired — I will go to my room.' She bowed once more to the circle of officers and went out. Cortés held the door for her. ,

'Suppose there should be something in this,' a timorous voice spoke.

'She looked fairly done; she had been through something to bring us the message,' another said.

'Oh, hell,' shouted the General rising. 'No one said anything while she was here, no one but D'Astorga. I don't know what to do.'

'She has never failed us . . .'

'Her information has always been correct . . .'

Again D'Astorga's coldly measured tones. 'I have spoken, your Excellency. There is but one course open to us, to my mind. To recall the regiments.'

'So you have said,' the General said acidly. He disliked and feared D'Astorga as the uneducated and self-indulgent man must always dislike and fear the self-controlled aristocrat. 'You think you have only got to talk to make me act. I am commanding officer here, sir. The regiments shall not be recalled. At least, not yet.'

His evil genius stepped forward. 'You are quite right, sir. Let us feel the pulse of the town. There will still be time to send a messenger to recall the regiments.'

The General clapped him on the back. 'My own idea,' he cried. 'My own idea.'

Young Cortés joined D'Astorga at the window.

'She was awfully upset,' he said. 'And D'Astorga, she is the keenest of us all on . . . the Empire.'

D'Astorga turned. 'Yes,' he said. 'With victory within our reach at Fez, as it may be at this moment, she would never have advised the recall of the regiments — unless she had proofs.'

'Then why did she not give them?'

D'Astorga shook his head. 'No man knows. She is a woman,' he said.

In her room, the door locked, Concha flung herself in an abandonment of remorse, on her knees beside the bed. She was lost. Where was she? Never had she so skirted deceit, so nearly proved herself unfaithful to her friends, to her cause. But was it her cause? Were they her friends? What was she doing? What did she want to do? To whom was she bound?

Life had been a jest, a wild adventure till his coming. Now, all was changed. She had felt a great unwillingness to admit her real position to this Englishman, to let one who honoured her father know how deeply she was involved in the dubious ways of the Spanish secret service. More than that. Since his coming she had at every point sacrificed the Spanish interests to his safety. That was perilously like playing the traitor, and opposed to the directness and honesty of her real character. Yet while she suffered from the thought

of her duplicity she faced the fact that it was, under the circumstances, her only course. She knew that it was beyond her power to betray Leslie Stewart. It was not fair, she told herself, that fate should have played her this trick. The English, yes, she hated them. Every one hated them. But this Englishman she could not hate.

Uneasily she began to see those men below with new eyes. Were they, she asked herself, worthy of an empire? 'In all that counts you are English.' The English were great empire-builders; the French great colonisers; the Spanish . . .

She rose slowly, overcome with fatigue, and as slowly laid herself down upon the bed, and was lost in the heavy sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXI

As Leslie robed himself in the garments of a Moorish merchant of the better class, his thoughts were of Concha. Safe-conduct, indeed. What was safety, what was life without her? Where was she? In Foukara? And when should they meet? For meet again they must.

The spirit of romance was about him. He would live to the height of these memorable moments, moments transcending reality. Life was in such moments. To Concha was given the gift of transfiguring the barren everyday world with the light wherein heroes live and great deeds are done. Thrilling with the thought of all the day might hold, he went down the stairs and passed Fitzgerald's critical inspection. His hands folded in the ample sleeves of his robe, with the slow step imposed by the heelless shoes of red morocco, he looked like any dignified young Moor.

'You'll do,' Fitzgerald said. 'Concha Nicholson herself would not know you.' He stooped to light a cigarette, his head bent. 'She has been at headquarters all the morning. Result, — H.Q. has got the wind up at last. A mounted orderly sent out of the Bab gate an hour since, with orders for the

Duke's recall. He won't get far. The Spanish in Foukara must be given a lesson before we let the news through to turn back the columns to their succour. 'Then French Morocco is saved.'

'And Foukara?'

Fitzgerald's face was grave. 'The devil! Who knows? If this leader — he comes from the hills — he is younger and greater than old Raisuli. If he can combine the glory of the old days with the methods of the new, he may yet give the hill Moors their independence. If I could see that! Spain forced back across the straits and a Moorish republic seated in the hills with its capital in Foukara!'

'And France?'

'Let her keep the south. Let her keep to the plains. She has done well. She has saved the mosques and the towers and the gardens, she has fostered beauty, the old arts, the old crafts, she has built roads and brought order. But the hope of the Moors is in the hills, the hillmen. And that girl, Leslie, that girl is of them, yet she fights for the Spaniard.' He pushed back his chair and rose. 'It is time.'

'We are going?'

'To Mahommed Ali's villa without the walls. He gives tea to a few friends under the orange trees, a few friends of whom we are numbered.

Yet these few friends must give the countersign.' He unbarred the huge front door and the two white figures issued into the dim arcaded street. From ahead of them came the cry of a donkey boy, '*Balek, Balek,*' and from behind the cry of a water-carrier, his skins of water on his back.

Speaking Arabic now, the two Englishmen followed the street of dwellings to a small open market square, trellised with vines above, where the merchants sat in their tiny shops behind their wares. Across this, Fitzgerald led the way through a poor native quarter, out by a gate in the town wall, which opened before them a prospect that held Stewart. The hill, upon which the town behind them was built, fell down to a valley, cut by a mountain stream and the country beyond rose to the wild rocky heights of the Riff Mountains. The side-hill below them was intersected by broken walls, dotted with ruined houses; wild cactus, wild olive reigned over neglected gardens. The valley-bottom was green, crossed and re-crossed by bamboo hedges which surrounded in places the darker green of orange groves.

'Imagine this, Stewart, as it was — before the Spaniard came. You know the East. This valley was a paradise. Gardens, groves of oranges and olives, running water, bubbling fountains, white villas; a happy and prosperous place. You see!

It's a waste; beautiful, if you like, with the beauty of neglect, but to you or to me who know, a tragedy, a crime!

He plunged down the path, a yellow-white line along the hillside, to a broken stone bridge, the long spans of whose arches crossed the river, flattened here into shallow reaches of clear water broken by banks of pale sand.

He paused on the bridge pointing upward. 'They destroy beauty and create ugliness. Look at those buildings. When the Spanish were driven out of here in '60 the Moors obliterated every trace of Spanish occupation. They did not leave one stone of Spanish building upon another. That will happen again one day!'

Over the bridge the two men entered a labyrinth of narrow muddy lanes between high and untidy hedges of bamboo, which were threaded by Fitzgerald with the assured step of custom, through many intricate turnings, until he stopped at a gate.

From behind the thin barricade of bamboo stems suddenly with unexpected charm came the light gay voices of children, the fine laughter of women.

Fitzgerald pulled a rope handle which rang a bell, whose tinkle seemed to chime with the twittering lilt of the voices. He smiled. 'The children and the slaves.'

Light feet approached and a young voice called in Arabic, 'Who comes?'

'A friend.' At the sound of Fitzgerald's voice and before he could add the countersign, the gate was flung open and he was met by a burst of gay laughter. He was evidently a friend and a favourite here. Over his shoulder, Leslie smiled at the charming picture. The orange grove laden with golden fruit stretched away to left and right, while on the paved path bordered by marble conduits of clear water, stood a brilliant group of girls and children. A little one in green ran forward to clasp Fitzgerald's legs. The girls catching sight of Leslie ran away followed by the other children.

'This is a great little one in green,' Fitzgerald said, as he lifted him and swung him up to his shoulder. 'A great little rogue and I'm teachin' him Irish. Isn't that so, little 'un?'

'Therewasalittlenuttree,' little 'un commanded, all in one word.

Fitzgerald roared with laughter. 'Listen to that.' And obeying the prompting of small heels hammering upon his chest, he sang,

'There was a little nut —'

'Tree,' shouted the little 'un.

'It would nothing —'

'Bear.'

'But a little nut —'

'Meg.'

'And a little golden —'

'Orange,' shouted the baby in great glee.

'No, no, pear, say "pear!"' He turned to Leslie with pride. 'He always says "orange," this little devil!'

The other children, gaining confidence, were returning, carrying their birds in osier cages. 'Sing to us, Son of the King,' they begged. 'Sing to us.'

And Fitzgerald with the little 'un in green still on his shoulder and the others clustering round, sang in his pleasant baritone,

'There was a little nut tree,
It would nothing bear
But a silver nutmeg
And a little golden pear.
The King of Spain's daughter
Came to visit me
All on account of my little nut tree.'

'Again, again,' they all shouted.

But he shook his head. 'You don't need to hear an old fellow sing. You've got your birds. Here, give me the cages and I will hang them up,' and taking the cages one by one he hung them in the orange trees.

'They always bring their birds when they come

on a picnic. Now, little 'un, down you go. Run away and play. We've got a war on.'

He turned to the old slave who with a smiling face and little crinkles of amusement around her small black eyes, stood waiting to conduct them.

She turned and waddled ahead towards the white walls of the villa. Through the orange trees, Leslie caught glints of colour, of flitting figures, emerald, coral, turquoise, amber; there was a scent of flowers, narcissi under the trees; a voice trilled — he fell under the old spell. Could any world, any life hold more innocent happiness, more selected beauty?

The marble conduits poured their crystal streams into marble basins upon a terrace in front of the villa. It was only there that Leslie realised that the walls only were standing, that the house was roofless, that the marble pavement was cracked and broken, the marble seats in fragments, that the luxuriance of the garden masked ruin.

Fitzgerald spoke, waving a hand as they passed, 'Spanish again. It was not a siege. There was no excuse, wanton destruction. We go up the steps to the higher terrace. Mahommed Ali has sworn never to cross the threshold or to rebuild the walls till the Spanish are driven out of El Foukara.'

A double flight of steps led to a terrace whose

marble parapet shone ivory-white against the dark green of an ilex hedge. There at the head of the steps they were met by Mahommed Ali. He was a man of commanding presence, with fine dark eyes. Though he was not over fifty, like all his race who mature rapidly, his beard and moustache were white. Behind him, shut in by the ilex hedges, reclining upon red morocco cushions, were gathered five men. The usual finely wrought brass tea-kettle in its stand loomed in the background. Before the place of the host stood a low silver table bearing the domed silver teapot, green mint, sugar, tiny painted glasses and small cakes of almond paste. The warm sun poured down upon them, the hum of bees filled the air. Through the opening in the ilex hedge at the top of the stairs there was a view of the garden where the knot of girls and children had re-formed around a basket of oranges. To all appearances this was simply one of those *al fresco* gatherings which the Moors love and where they appear at their best, sipping green tea in a dreamy content, without boredom, loving and living in the sheer beauty of the moment.

Leslie remembered many such parties in Persia, in the gardens of Ispahan. Here as he and Fitzgerald stepped forward, the company rose and he found in their greetings a measured courtesy, a

grave dignity which he knew. Fitzgerald named them:

‘Sidi Mahommed el Abid’ — an old man of fine hawk-like profile — ‘vows his sons and his nephews to the cause. His is a great house.’

‘Abdhur Rahman’ — a tall, magnificently handsome Moor — ‘gives of his wealth with both hands. He heads the merchants of the great Bazaar.’

‘Abdul Azad’ — a slender figure whose beautiful saintly face was of the traditional Christ-type — ‘leads the faithful to fight a holy war.’

‘Mahommed el Mahdi,’ — a soldierly figure of middle age, wearing a turban and flowing jellab over a Spanish uniform, — ‘who has served under the Conqueror and suffered much.’

‘Hassan Ali’ — a young, handsome, scented, smooth-faced boy — ‘leads the young Moors. A poet. An intellectual.’

‘To you I present the Sahib Leslie Stewart who comes through much peril, to bring the — er — sympathy of my Government in our difficulties and a credit of much money from friends. We have money for guns, for boots, for ammunition. My friends, it is magnificent assistance. Remember, it is unofficial.’

Mahommed Ali spoke for them all. He voiced a friendship for Fitzgerald which is unusual be-

tween men of different race. He accepted the assistance with the grand air of a man conferring a favour. They were all, he said, bound together in one indissoluble bond; hatred of the Spaniard.

He could speak for his quarter, when he said that all was prepared; that at a given signal they would rise. The others re-echoed his words.

They all sat down. Mahommed Ali resumed his place, clapping his hands for the attendants who detached themselves from the bright group below and mounted the steps to stand at his side, ready to hand the tiny glasses of mint tea to the guests.

'We await only Abd-el-Krid,' Mahommed Ali said, as they gravely sipped their tea.

'The signal was given him from the housetop and answered from the mountain. Yet he comes not,' the boy, Hassan, complained.

'It is useless to act from within if we have not help from without,' the words came from the rich merchant.

They were quickly answered by Hassan Ali, who leant forward, the colour mounting to his boyish forehead.

'Abdhur Rahman has riches, but his blood is cold. Shall we wait for help from the hills when the moment has come? The garrison is few. We are many. Let us strike.'

‘Without the hillmen we fail,’ repeated the merchant equably.

The young man appealed to the soldier. ‘Speak, El Mahdi,’ he cried. ‘Shall we wait for the hillmen, we of the proud blood of Granada? Let the hillmen fight for themselves. We fight for ourselves.’

‘And the devil take the hindermost,’ Fitzgerald broke in grimly. ‘Our strength is in the hills, oh, Hassan. We wait for the hill chieftain.’

CHAPTER XXII

'I AM here.' With the words, the hedge behind them parted, and a young man stood in their midst — a Berber of the Riff. With him came a wave of power, a stir of life. Fair-skinned, thick-set, with keen, intelligent eyes, he stood for a moment in silence, confident, composed. Then he saluted his host, bowed to the others and spoke standing, his hand upon his hip.

'I saw the signal, but I needed it not. I too have eyes. From my hill have I seen. Foukara is ours. To-night, after midnight we strike. We sweep down from the hills. Spring is here and like the waters from the mountain, the hillmen descend into the plain.'

For a moment there shone in the faces of the assembled leaders all the old antagonism of the townsmen for the wild tribes of the hills. Memories of old fears, of old feuds, were in their blood. For centuries they had held their gates, the beautiful gates of El Foukara, against the men of the Riff. Old Sidi Mahommed sat erect, an inscrutable expression on his hawk-like face. The eyes of the other men turned to Fitzgerald. Sensitive as an Irishman is sensitive to the mood, the unspoken feeling, he answered the young chieftain.

‘Abd-el-Krid, greeting. To me, a friend of the Moor, this is a great moment. Where, O friends, lies strength? In unity. Do I not see for the first time in the immemorial history of your deathless race, the dawn of unity? Facing one foe, the usurper, the Spaniard, I see here to-day, the hills joining their strength to the strength of the towns. Old feuds are forgotten, old jealousies are banished; together hillmen and townsmen fight side by side, for a common cause, Moorish liberty!’ His eyes sought his audience, ‘In the noble lineage of Sidi Mahommed, in the wealth of Abdhur Rahman, in the prayers of Azad, in the sword of El Mahdi, in the verses of Hassan, Abd-el-Krid shall find such support as no hill-chieftain has ever known. He shall trust them and they shall trust in him. My friends,’ he embraced them all in his address, ‘it is to this united party that your friends in England lend their help, confident of your combined success.’

He sat down and before El Krid could reply Mahommed Ali, in stately and measured terms, repeated the substance of Fitzgerald’s words. He was a force in the town, a man upright, honest and true, who had suffered much and said little. He knew on what a thread hung this unity of which they spoke.

As he finished, the young hillman stepped forward

'I am,' he said, 'no orator. Words are not mine. I am a rough man of the camps. When I said, Foukara is ours, I but meant that she is the jewel, the pearl wrested from the Spaniards, to hang once again upon the green hills of the Riff. But this,' he moved forward with a brusque movement of his arm which disclosed to his astonished countrymen the soldier's dress beneath the Eastern jellab, 'is but the first step. All shall follow. You of the towns have long languished under the yoke of the conqueror. We of the hills,' he struck his chest with his clenched fist, 'will be in your condition unless we are warned in time. What right,' he cried, pointing an accusing finger at Fitzgerald, 'had the Powers who sat across the water in a Spanish town, what right had they to give the unconquered Riff to a king, the King of Spain?' He laughed. 'Are these things possible? Shall a man give away what is not his? Shall he gamble with the money of another? We are a people, the Riffi, one hundred and fifty thousand strong. For a thousand years, we have held our hills, we have preserved our customs, we have kept our language. Who was our master? The Sultan? Never. We acknowledged him not. We are free. We are the unconquered. And the King of Spain dares call himself our lord!'

A sigh of sympathy answered him. He paused,

and went on talking now with quiet force. 'What have we done to deserve this? Industrious, our people raise their crops in the valleys, herd their cattle on the hills. We swear no oaths, we drink no wine, we marry but one wife. We are a people with the soul of a people. And there in four walls in a house across the water, men who know us not, give this people as a bauble, as a bribe, to a king who knows us not.' His arms dropped at his sides. There was silence on the terrace. Then he raised his head, 'I fight for my people,' he said. 'To-night, here, another day, there. But fight we shall as long as life endures. We fail to-day? To-morrow to us the victory.'

Fitzgerald sprang to his feet. 'Your hand,' he said. One by one the others followed him. Leslie came last.

'Clever fellow,' he remarked, as he took his seat again by Fitzgerald's side. 'That talk was all for us.'

'We deserve it,' Fitzgerald declared. 'We were parties to that. Incredible, eh?'

Leslie shook his head. 'It's all a game,' he said. 'But I agree that it ought not to be.'

Again Fitzgerald rose. 'His Excellency here has come at the risk of his life, to bring us the money for all that we so much need.' He drew forth the packets of bank notes. 'Here,' he said, 'are funds

to purchase all. This money I propose to place between the hands of Mahommed Ali. To him it shall be left to grant from this as he deems right to each section.' Very gravely, with the murmured approbation of the others present, Fitzgerald placed the packet in the hands of the merchant. 'With the suggestion,' he added, 'that a certain sum should be granted now to Abd-el-Krid to purchase the guns of which he has great need and which he will use to secure the liberty of his people.'

After further routine business, the hill-leader gave his orders for the night's attack. Between midnight and dawn, El Mahdi should attack the garrison at the West gate, while he, with his men, would attack the East, and Fitzgerald the South.

Leslie turned in protest. 'You surely won't figure in this affair?'

'Won't I?' Fitzgerald drawled. 'You just wait.'

'But —' protested Leslie aghast.

'But me no buts. I am going to. And that's that.'

Abd-el-Krid, throwing his jellab around him, advanced to take leave. Turning to the Englishmen, he bowed. 'Our ends in this are double. The English would save the French in Morocco. We would regain our liberty. So far,' he paused, 'our ways may lie together.'

Fitzgerald returned his bow. 'Beyond the first turning, only the gods can see,' he quoted sententiously.

'The signal?' asked El Mahdi coming forward.

'We light a beacon-fire upon the height ere we sweep down to the attack.'

'The Spaniards guess nothing? They have no suspicions?' the merchant asked.

'How can they not suspect,' El Mahdi growled. 'Hassan and his silly friends sing their songs in every café.'

'Because, O man of battle,' Hassan replied saucily, 'they cannot understand a word I sing.'

'There are spies.'

'A fig for their spies. My friends and I sing deeds of ancient valour to stir the people. If the Spaniards guess there is something afoot it is not through us. And who knows that they have fears?'

'We know,' Abd-el-Krid replied. 'They sent a messenger from the Bab gate to-day. He lies dead on the Fez road.'

'The wires are cut,' Mahommed Ali murmured. 'The messenger went at the risk of his life to recall the troops.'

'And no other has gone out?'

Abd-el-Krid shrugged. 'It may be. No one may pass. My men keep watch.' With a curt gesture he turned and vanished as he had come.

The gathering broke up. Abdul Azad stood, his meek head bowed, his hands raised as he murmured a blessing. El Mahdi clasped the hilt of his dagger. Hassan Ali seized his roll of paper. Abdhur Rahman embraced Mahommed Ali. Sidi Mahommed Ali rose with a movement to which centuries of breeding had given beauty. Fitzgerald and Leslie made their adieux and preceded the others down the steps and through the garden. It was still. The slaves and the children had gone, taking with them life and laughter.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE two men spoke little as they walked back to the bridge. Moved by impulse and affection, Fitzgerald was blind to the faults of those he loved. His sympathy, his warm, exuberant nature were on the side of the oppressed everywhere and in El Foukara he had seen in the person of his Moorish friends, such men as Mahommed Ali and Sidi Mahommed-el-Abid, the fine flower of the East under the heel of such men as General Miguel and a venal Sindaco.

The witness of ceaseless petty injustices, of endless oppressions, he had but one idea, to set the city free. This had become the obsession of his waking hours, the dream of his long nights. Save France in Morocco, yes, but first save El Foukara.

As they reached the bridge, he looked up. 'By Jove, Stewart, there go the little people up the hill. Nice little people. They've kept me going, I tell you. Mahommed Ali has given me the freedom of his house. Our roofs adjoin. His wives are purdah, but the children and the slaves are a cheerful lot. How the little 'un in green hates learning his Koran! Always in a pickle.'

The moving line of colour vanished through the city gate.

‘Oh, come on, Stewart,’ he cried irritably. ‘What’s El Foukara but a muck-heap! It’s time that we got back and changed these clothes and showed ourselves at the café on the Place. That’s where I drink my lonely *apéritif* every night and exchange bows with the Sindaco and the Dutch Consul, while the Spanish officers skirt the edge of insult, especially if there’s a German about, and I hold my tongue and my temper.’

As, once more in European dress, they started forth to the café, Fitzgerald began again his mocking humour. ‘You saw the Place de l’Espagne this morning. Hasn’t it gathered all the blatant vulgarity of the West within its four walls? It’s a blot on the beauty of the old town. While I have walked back and forth this winter, I have fitted words to it, strident, insistent, a jangle of colours, of forms, of sounds. Yet it is more drab than coloured, more ineffectual than potent. It’s the yell of the conqueror, my boy, at ears which will not hear. The Moors never cross that square if they can avoid it. Do you blame them?’

He paused, pointing a finger of scorn. ‘The hotel, the café, the new art of Munich! The green squirrel perched on the red tiles! Hideous, decadent, beastly. This and then — that —’ He

waved a hand to where, above the cinema across the square, rose the pale walls of what had been the Sultan's palace. A minaret broke the skyline like a pale taper with a golden wick. And as they moved forward, the notes of the call to prayer wavered out upon the air, faint and clear, drowned by a burst of jazz music as the door of the café was opened.

'This is what we do,' Fitzgerald said resentfully. 'We all do it. The worst of the West comes to batten upon the East. We bring no lamp to illuminate, we bring a headlight that blinds. It makes me sick. It has been the same everywhere that we have meddled. Great God! What a tangle! Think of the Spanish in Peru. Think of that civilisation of the Incas, a real civilisation, mind you, a light from within, blown out by the Spaniards. Darkness settles. Think of the Indians in America and the Maoris in the South Seas. And look at this square and look at our slums and look at this beastly war and what do you make of it? It's hands off, I say. Who of us is fit to be his brother's keeper? Oh, hell, Leslie, there I go again. I'm Irish. Put it down to that.'

He pushed open the door and the two men entered. Some wandering exponent of the new art which is older than the pyramids, had decorated the walls. Nowhere was there a space for the eye to rest. In the great mirror behind the

bar all the colours met, and bottles and glasses broke the colour again into bits. It was a welter of colour, cut up by the jazzing piano, so that the very air, hot from a large stove, seemed glaring.

Thick cigar smoke, tables and chairs, men and some women.

‘Civilisation,’ muttered Fitzgerald grimly, leading the way to his usual table to the left against the wall. The bar was between him and the door. The pianola was opposite.

‘Yes, this is where I sit every night and bow, like this, to that insolent Dutchman, and like this to that Swiss cinema agent and like this to the Sindaco, that coffee-coloured dandy with the much painted lady of easy virtue. But, by Jove, Stewart, I’m a happy man to-night. I am not alone. Think of it, when the war is over and I have stuck at my post, they’ll give me the M.B.E. and think it less an insult than an honour. Think they’ve paid me well. Life is a joke, take it from me! We play the game with faith and some illusion, until one day we see there is neither faith nor illusion. Then you begin to laugh at yourself and the world. The old Dutchman looks depressed to-night. Ah, here he comes. He has not spoken to me in a month. Straws show which way the wind blows. Ah, Van der Byl, to what do I owe this honour?’

The Dutchman poured out his fears. Had Fitz-

gerald heard that the garrisons were nearly emptied and that there were rumours of a rising?

Fitzgerald laughed. 'My poor Van der Byl, how should I hear anything? You are a neutral. You have nothing to fear.'

'Oh, you don't think so?'

'Fly the Dutch flag and keep close. You'll be all right.'

'How do you know, Mr. Fitzgerald?'

'How do I know anything? By thinking about it. Either that or run to your Spanish friends for protection.'

'Then you have heard rumours?'

'Not a rumour, sir. I never listen to rumours. Facts are all that count with me. You can go back now and finish your bock with perfect confidence that the Dutch flag will save your skin if trouble comes.' He nodded a dismissal, which the other accepted, shuffling back to his beer.

'And that precious cur has not dared to call his soul his own for months. Hasn't dared to look at me, toadying to the Spanish and the Germans. The Sindaco seems worried, he has no attention to spare for his fair companion. There are no officers here to-night.'

He had hardly spoken the words, when the door opened to admit a group of men in uniform.

'The General commanding,' Fitzgerald ex-

claimed sharply. 'The porcine gentleman — and his staff — and a lady.'

Leslie saw her as she advanced — Concha in her riding dress, laughing with a bit of a swagger, the centre of the group. She was at the General's right hand, but she was talking to D'Astorga.

'She has picked the best of the bunch,' Fitzgerald growled. 'If they were all like him.'

The Englishmen rose as the General passed, returned his salute and resumed their seats.

'She is a great actress,' Fitzgerald said, 'but she saw you.'

'Why are they here?' Leslie asked. His mouth was dry. 'If they have heard rumours?'

'To show that they have not. The Spanish gentleman has courage.'

'But Miss Nicholson? Is it safe? Is she safe?'

'With them?' Fitzgerald looked blank. 'How do I know? You don't suggest that we should elope with her? No, she must play her own game. She knows that life's a joke, my boy. Take it from me. She hasn't much faith or illusion left, I'll bet — at twenty.'

'I don't agree at all,' Leslie's voice was coldly final. 'I've never met a woman so full of — well — of illusion and faith.'

'Take it back. She does seem to be keeping faith with you.' Fitzgerald was lighting his pipe.

Leslie glanced down the room. The Sindaco and the lady were dancing, to the pianola. So were the Swiss cinema agent and another Spanish girl. The Dutch Consul sat sleepily over his beer and at the other end of the room was the group of Spanish officers and Concha. Was this the girl whom he had left outside the gates before sunrise? After all they had shared of peril and adventure could she deny him any scrap of recognition? Was she pleased with her bloated General? When she laughed, did she enjoy? Or, as Fitzgerald said, was she just playing the game?

At that instant above the jazzing piano came the crack of a pistol outside in the street, followed by a second. At the same time the door was flung open and a Spanish orderly dashed in. The officers sprang to their feet. An aide called, 'Bar that door!'

The fat barkeeper, his red face blanched, was already barricading it with tables, aided by the Sindaco who had left his partner planted in the middle of the floor.

'Hell! It's come!' Fitzgerald got to his feet. 'Ten to one it's that ass of a Hassan.'

More shots, sounds of running feet, the yell of a mob. The barkeeper rushed across the room to the General, pointing some way to safety. The small group of officers drew together. The Eng-

lishmen, with their backs against the wall, waited. The tension was supreme. The noise in the street surged up to the door. There was a rain of blows, the sound of splintering wood.

Leslie, with his eye on the Spaniards, saw a young officer, a mere boy, spring forward to the centre of the room facing the door. At the same instant the barkeeper opened a rear door and the General followed by his staff passed out. Concha for an instant held back, calling sharply to the boy, with a flickering glance at Leslie. It was a look strange, appealing, startled. She turned quickly to follow the staff, borne towards the door by the press of the others in the room who had seen a way to safety.

The door was shut. She laid her hand on the knob, turning it. The door was locked on the outside. She stood quite still, shaking her head at the women behind her. Leslie sprang across the room to her. But she did not look at him. She pushed her way through the frightened group about her, and drawing an automatic from her pocket, ranged herself beside the boy.

As the door crashed in and the first Moor appeared in the opening, the boy fired. His man went down, but others pressed behind, leaping now over the barricade. Two shots met them. The girl had fired as well. The boy leapt forward

and fell. Concha Nicholson started to his aid, but her arms were seized from behind and she was drawn back from the *mêlée* by the door.

Fitzgerald's voice boomed out above the cries, the shooting, the confusion. He had jumped upon a chair and roared forth furious orders and reproaches. His great voice reached even to Hassan Ali, shouting curses so vehement that the attack came to a sudden halt. None of the cowering, nondescript crowd of Europeans understood his words. But Concha understood.

'Do forgive me,' Leslie was saying. She shook her head, her eyes covered with her hands. She had seen the Spanish boy overpowered, his hated uniform stabbed through and through upon the floor. Brave little Cortés — even Leslie had ceased to exist for her in that moment.

Fitzgerald, now face to face with Hassan Ali, shook his great fist under the nose of the poet with an energy of contempt. 'Oh, you white-livered chicken. You won't take orders from your betters, won't you? Unreliable, shifting as the sands, who's to help you, when you betray each other? Clear out, clear out, the whole pack of you, before the Spaniards surround you and eat you up. Go, sing your songs, Hassan Ali, but keep from men's work yet a little while.'

Hassan Ali, put to shame before his followers,

young men whom he had inspired by his songs, stood white and sullen, yet impudent.

‘And if we had been a moment sooner? If we had taken the Spanish General and his officers with him? Then you would have said, “How wise is Hassan. Here is a hero.”’

‘Oh, fool,’ Fitzgerald shouted in exasperation. ‘You think only of yourself. Yet you are under orders. Go now, with your followers, and report to El Mahdi.’

‘And the woman who fired upon us,’ Hassan objected. ‘She shall be punished.’

‘She is my prisoner,’ Fitzgerald declared. ‘I am under orders, as art thou. I know my duty. Go —’ He stood waving an insistent arm towards the door and Hassan Ali, realising the possible result of his premature action, turned and followed his men, who were already slinking from the café. Fitzgerald continued to wave and the cowering knot of people lost no time in following, stepping aside as they passed the figure in the uniform upon the floor. Then he turned. Leslie stood looking at Concha who sat upon the edge of a table idly kicking someone’s forgotten hat with the toe of her riding-boot. After all, she seemed to say, it was all in the day’s work.

CHAPTER XXIV

Not until they were in the empty square did Concha speak. Out here Moors and Spaniards alike had vanished, only the face of the porter at the hotel showed for a moment at the door.

‘So,’ she said in a low scathing tone, ‘this is the way you behave! Two Englishmen stand by, while a white man is killed by natives. Times have changed.’

‘He was fighting his own battle,’ Fitzgerald said coldly. ‘If we had fired a shot, not a soul in the room would have escaped. Stewart, will you walk on Miss Nicholson’s other side?’

With a composure which both men admired, Concha accepted the position, walking between them with an unaffected dignity. Yet, though she carried her head high, there was a new and intolerable misgiving in her mind. The General, his staff — even D’Astorga, had forgotten her. Not one of them, for whom she had risked so much, had troubled himself about her safety. She tried to tell herself that they had treated her as a comrade-in-arms. They were accustomed to see her take care of herself. They expected her to be as independent as she claimed to be. But, in spite

of these assurances, the thought rose rankling, would they have treated one of their own women so? What did they think of her? She bit her lip, keeping back the tears of mortification which were near her eyes. What place did she hold in their esteem? The daughter of Nicholson — Kaid Nicholson — for the first time in her wilful career, a career in which as mistress of a fortune she had acted many parts to her own satisfaction, for the first time felt a doubt of her own actions, felt a cold dread of the world and its censure, a world which she had hitherto so gallantly defied. Bitterer still was a further doubt which tormented her as she became more and more conscious of Leslie Stewart's presence at her side — what did he think of it? He had seen.

Fitzgerald was talking to her, trying to carry off the difficult situation as easily as might be. 'Hope we are not walking you too fast. Want to get you out of the streets. Can I do anything for you? Send any message to your friends?'

She laughed, throwing up her chin. 'I have no friends.'

Leslie recognised the bitterness and knew its cause. Fitzgerald blundered a bit.

'The General. I could send a message. They will be anxious.'

'Please don't trouble. I hope that they are too

busy to think about me. But,' she turned quickly, flashing the question at him, 'may I ask why you, the British Consul, are on the side of the Moors against Spain?'

'How do you know that I am?'

'I speak Arabic. I know Arabic. You forget.'

'Not at all. In fact I've often wanted to ask you why you were on the side of the Spanish against the Moors?'

She shrugged. Fitzgerald went on, 'But that's not my affair. Just damned curiosity. As you understood so much, Miss Nicholson, don't you really understand why we are on the side — that we are? There is a great war on. While the big powers are in it up to the hilt, smaller nations are busy. While the cat's away — I need not explain.'

'Oh, yes,' she cried, vividly scornful. 'England is jealous again! Jealous now of Spain! She knows that we had the world and lost it and fears that we shall become great again. And so have we vowed! France in Morocco? What right has France in Morocco? In Algeria, in Tunisia, yes. But Morocco is for Spain! And you both, you, Mr. Fitzgerald, who live here, and you, Mr. Stewart, who have come here on a mission that I know, tell me why you are against Spain?' It was an appeal made with all her fire, all her charm.

‘Young lady,’ Fitzgerald answered bluntly, his Irish accent very strong, ‘your English blood should tell you. Your father — the kaid — had no love for the Spaniard.’

‘He gave me a Spanish governess.’

‘Ah, for manners and parlour tricks.’ He paused. ‘I knew him,’ he said.

She looked up at him slantingly. ‘You knew my father?’

‘Yes.’

They walked on in a silence which drew them closer together. ‘A great man. A great Englishman,’ Fitzgerald repeated. ‘You must not think that we are not your friends. We are. I am, and so’s Stewart. We think that you’ll be safer to-night in the house of a Moor than at Spanish headquarters.’

‘Safe?’ she cried scornfully. ‘I don’t want to be safe.’

Fitzgerald laughed. ‘My child,’ he said, ‘I do it less for you than for your father’s sake.’

They were now passing through the *souks* where an unwonted quiet reigned. News of Hassan Ali’s fiasco had run through the town and already fearing reprisals, the people had retired behind their doors. Here and there at the sound of their footsteps, they caught sight of a rapidly retreating figure or glimpsed a grey face that peered

for a moment from behind the hanging curtain of a door.

'Do you mind telling me where you are taking me?' Concha asked.

'To the house of a merchant, Mahommed Ali. It is next door to my house where I should have been delighted to receive you, but I have neither food nor fire. The roofs adjoin. You can always slip over there and be safe under the British flag.'

'Thank you,' she smiled a bit sarcastically, but she liked him.

'Hope you won't mind quarters in the harem.'

'Not at all. I understand the women and they understand me. They've all heard of my mother. We chatter. They're very happy. Nothing to worry them. They'll give me all I need, thank you.'

They turned into the dark vaulted street, already familiar to Leslie, of the Consulate, and passing the door and a long blank wall came to the next door of pale cinnamon-coloured wood, immensely wide, carved above and brightened by metal hinges and nail-heads. Fitzgerald lifted the great knocker which clanged down the vaulted street. A small inner panel in the door instantly slid open and through its iron grill a voice questioned.

Fitzgerald stepping close murmured the password, bolts were withdrawn, a ponderous key turned and the door was opened by an armed guard who closed and locked the door after them. They were in a narrow mean passage, its walls of dark stained plaster, which they followed for forty feet by several right-angled turns, each of which was guarded, till they came into a bare apartment, where in ordinary times the sons of the house might have been found chanting the Koran all cross-legged on their cushions.

To-night the children were safe in the inner sanctuary of the harem and here against the wall, arms were stacked, short ugly rifles and sidearms. Concha drew a quick breath. On again through a short passage which ended in the patio, paved with tiles of black and white marble. All here seemed quiet, the peace undisturbed. A double row of pillars finely tiled in shades of blue supported the arcade which opened at the right under horseshoe arches by shallow steps into a garden. There tiled paths led beneath date-palms and cypresses, through plantations of mimosa and roses, of orange and lemon trees heavy with fruit. Tanks of clear running water full of goldfish fed the runnels which ran like crystal threads between the greenery. A green parrot sat embowered in pink almond blossom. A grey monkey

played in a lemon tree. Cages of singing birds hung beneath the arches of the patio itself, where in the centre a fountain rising from a marble basin played its unending juggling with a myriad crystal drops. It was a place of beauty achieved through the refinement of centuries, lovely as a dream. Used as they were to the East, they paused for a moment entranced. Yet the dream was not untroubled, for from the garden now came the sound of a quick order and the rattle of a musket and through the colonnade an armed guard paced.

Concha drew closer to Fitzgerald. 'Am I,' she asked, 'a prisoner of the Moor?'

Fitzgerald flashed a glance at her full of kindly humour.

'You are,' he replied, with a bow, 'the daughter of a friend.'

She smiled her thanks as halting them by the fountain, the guard walked on and knocked three times upon a lofty door of carved and painted wood. It opened and Mahommed Ali came forward to meet them. His noble figure was worthy of its setting, both in the dignity of its bearing and in the fineness and elegance of his apparel. He wore the *k'sa*, that indoor robe of gauzy white silk affected by Moorish gentlemen, over a kaftan of sea-green cloth.

His face was grave as he gave them a greeting.

'El Mahdi is within and Abdhur Rahman who brings news of Hassan Ali's madness. The Spanish are alarmed. A second messenger was sent out. His head is with the other on the walls. No one may pass. We need your wisdom, O Excellency,' he bowed to Fitzgerald.

No one noticed the sudden pallor of the girl's face. The messengers had failed. No one might pass? The garrisons were doomed!

She rallied, turning to Leslie. 'Look,' she cried softly, pointing to the flaming sky above the tree-tops of the garden. 'What a sunset! Let's see it from the roof! Shall we see it from the roof? Would you like to?'

'Ra-ther.'

'Not now. I must go to the harem first. In half an hour?'

'The daughter of a friend,' Fitzgerald was saying. 'May she find safety to-night with the ladies in the harem?'

Mahommed Ali bowed, clapping his hands. In a moment without another word or glance Concha had followed the slave.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was almost dark up the narrow stair by which Leslie mounted. He stepped out upon the flat roof. It had not been easy to manage, but here he was. The scented spires of the cypresses in the garden rose above the parapet to his left, to his right and at a lower level was the empty roof of the Consulate and, as he stepped forward, before him lay the wide pale city warm in the afterglow, against the greenish primrose of the evening sky. And sitting on the parapet, gazing over the city, was a figure in native dress. Afraid that through some mistake he had intruded upon a lady of the household, he hesitated. But it was Concha, who turned to him pointing to the city.

‘Look, the beauty! It is a miracle. Nothing, nothing is as beautiful, and I hate it!’ He stood at her side. She was silent, leaning out, her gaze still on the city where each moment saw the melting of tone into tone, the translation of a city of warm day into a city of pale night, of pearly mystery. The Anjera Hills, the Riffian Hills rose around in purple enchantment. The stars came trembling into the sky. Her strained attitude relaxed and she rose.

She spoke scornfully. 'It was quite easy to come. Intrigue is the breath of life in the harem. They gave me these,' she touched her veil and *haik*. 'They were all delighted — giggles — softness —' She shivered. 'Softness — all that this beauty stands for. Don't you see?' Without waiting for him to speak she rushed on, 'Oh, I know what you think — that the Spaniards are as bad. But they are not quite.'

'Not — quite,' he repeated, and looked at her. He was struck by her face. It was so still and white, grave and poignantly sweet.

'Oh, you don't know them,' she fenced. 'How brave. Many of them of steel. To-day — little Cortés —' He bowed. 'Well, there are others like him, who know how to suffer, who will live on bread and water in this wilderness for an Ideal. These Moors,' she rushed on, 'who made all this,' she waved an embracing hand to the city fading into a beauty suggested rather than expressed, 'what are they? You know as well as I do. Single groups. Brave, too, as lions, but with no patriotism. Men without a country.'

Leslie shook his head, half smiling. 'You can say this? You, a daughter of the hills! Of the unconquered? Of the blood — who knows — of Rome? Isolated units, yes, but waiting only for the hour and the man.'

'They've waited a thousand years,' she mocked.

'A moment of time. They are at the start. Spain at the finish.'

'Never!' She clasped her hands together in the same attitude of strain that he had noticed when she had stopped him outside the gate years ago — or was it only yesterday? 'Oh, why have we talked like this?' she cried. 'I did not mean to. What does it matter?' She bit her lip, looking away, then turned back to him. 'I asked you to come up, because I had something to say. One never knows these days. I wanted to ask you to trust me whatever happens, whatever I do. If it all seemed against me and I couldn't explain, I'd like you to believe that I had tried to do what I thought was — well — that I was playing the game. Will you?' She looked at him steadily.

'Concha,' he took a step towards her and the passion in his voice was unmistakable.

She put out her hand. 'No, no, not to-night. Please not to-night. Only help me. Say that you trust me. Will you trust me?'

'Absolutely.'

She sighed. There was a moment's pause. 'You must go,' she said with a visible effort.

'Not yet,' he pleaded. 'I've only just come. I don't understand.'

‘Don’t try to understand. You’ve promised to trust me.’

‘But aren’t you making a mistake? Giving all for nothing?’

She flushed. ‘You mean to-day. You saw. Of course you couldn’t understand. They think of me as a comrade, one of themselves, not as a woman in a drawing-room.’

‘Oh, that was nothing, might have happened anywhere to any one.’ He saved her pride. ‘But deeper than that. Won’t you tell me?’

She turned away, her veil across her face. ‘Not yet,’ she begged.

‘Very well,’ he said firmly, ‘as you wish. Not to-night, but soon. I am going back. You know that I am going back.’

There was a sound — a sob, a word, a cry, of one who is tried too far. Leslie, in a passion of love and pity, caught her in his arms, ‘Concha.’

For an instant she rested there, white, slight, crushed against him. Only an instant, when to their ears came a thin, long-drawn cry, the keening of women on the housetops. She started away from him, her face tense, her startled eyes on his. ‘Oh, I know what that means. I’ve heard it before. War — fighting — death —’ She put her hands against his chest pushing him away. ‘Oh, go down now, please go.’

He covered her hands with his. 'And leave you? You're trembling. You are frightened.'

She shook her head, still keeping him away. 'Not frightened. Not frightened. But you must go. You promised to trust me. Go.'

The keening cry rose thinly from the far roofs and growing in strength swept over the town.

She was frantic now. 'Go,' she cried. 'Go. Don't you see, the women will be coming up.'

'I don't want to,' Leslie said bluntly. He turned and went down.

She stood quite still listening, till his footsteps had died away upon the stair, then, snatching a wrap from the wall, she sprang lightly upon the parapet and down the few steps of the ladder that led to the roof of the Consulate. Was the trapdoor open? It might well be. Fitzgerald, she knew from the harem gossip, used the roof as a short cut to and from Mahommed Ali's garden in the hours when the women were not upon the house-top. In a frenzy of haste, because at any moment the women might appear above her and see her and raise the alarm, she fled across the roof. Not only was the door unfastened, it was open. She started down the narrow stair, when she was seized by a cold dread. It was eerie work, this, stealing like a thief into an empty house. Suppose it were not empty? Her courage oozed at the thought.

She softly opened the door at the bottom of the stair, just a crack, and listened and peered. How silent! How ghostly! She pushed it open and stole, a ghost herself, into the gallery, with quick glances at the empty rooms, with almost a smile at the masculine disorder. She passed quickly to the second stair, crept down it in the dark, and with a sense of relief, ran across the patio to the passage which led to the street. Here she stopped in sheer terror. She heard a key turn in the lock of the street-door. With the quick wit that had saved her so often, she threw the brown wrap around her, and flying back, sank against the well-head into the patch of darkest shadow in the courtyard.

Fitzgerald relocked the street-door and his step came nearer down the passage. She felt that he must hear her heart beat, her pulses hammer. He paused. Had he heard her? No, he only struck a match to light a cigarette. His step passed just the other side of the well as he crossed to the stairs.

Now for it! Could she gain the shelter of the passage silently while he went up the stairs? She listened. Up one step — two steps — three steps — she must move. She rose and passed noiselessly from the courtyard to the passage, where she leaned to still her beating pulses against the wall.

Now she heard him whistling above. Feeling along the wall, she followed the passage to the door, felt for the key and turned it with both hands, drew it out, opened the door and slipped into the street.

She locked the door behind her leaving the key.

CHAPTER XXVI

ONCE in the street, Concha hurried along, close to the wall, afraid that at any moment she would hear the sounds of a hue and cry behind her. The dread of being followed, of being stopped, of return, was heavy upon her. Her feet seemed like lead, her mouth was dry. Along the empty tunnel of the arcaded street she crept, cold with the fear of pursuit, stopping now and then to listen for any sound of following feet. All was still below, but from above came that long, savage, wavering cry, which sent an icy chill through her blood. She had heard it before. She had heard it in Fez, where shut safely within the palace, she had known the echoes of the horror that held sway outside. She had never forgotten. No one could ever forget.

There was no time to lose. If she was to save the Spanish in El Foukara she must hasten. No one could pass, they had said. But she must make the attempt, risk all, dare all, to save the garrisons.

No, she must not think ahead, just go on steadily and step by step.

Now with a sense of relief, she emerged from the gloom of the covered streets into a little square of native shops and cafés. Here she lost her fear.

In the jellab of a hill-woman no one remarked upon her, hurrying on to the city-gate to pass out before the trouble began. Oh, yes, it was coming. There was a stir, an expectancy in the air which vibrated to that high shrill cry. The streets were empty of the usual life and traffic. As she turned a corner she came upon a band of natives carrying rifles. And, again, as she started on, she heard excited voices, and pausing, knew that some one was distributing arms. In anguish she thought of her futile appeals, of the morning, to D'Alves, to the General. They had not listened, because she had withheld the proofs. That was why she was here. There had been no question in her mind of her obligation.

Still further on, she met a Moor, with turbaned head, in uniform — El Mahdi on his way to the West gate followed by men with spades and picks. She knew that meant a trench, a barricade.

With every fresh sign of preparation, her will became stronger, her purpose more fixed, her anger against the natives rose. How dared they? It seemed as if the blood of the Spanish grandees in her dominated and controlled the blood of the Moor. She had no sympathy with them, she had lost all affection for them since her sojourn in Spain.

And now she was in the Place de l'Espagne. The café was alight again and as the door opened,

the sound of the pianola came jazzing forth once more. She shivered, remembering the body as it had lain crumpled upon the floor. Where had they carried him? The hotel was brightly lighted. The Spanish were making a good bluff. She was proud of that. She must give them warning, courage to hold out till help came. She would send a message back by Abdullah. No time to waste now. She hurried along by the wall of the barracks. Above flew the headquarters flag against the sky. She joined a little band of hurrying peasants, greeting them in the patois of the Riff. They spoke of Abd-el-Krid. She kept silence, moving along with them, her thoughts on the flag above. Did she ever, after this night's work was done, want to see any of them up there again? D'Astorga, perhaps, but that vile General — Cortés was the best of them. All the best of them were going like that. She thought of France, of the French and English boys everywhere embracing death. And Leslie was going back.

She stumbled, nearly fell. The peasant woman at her side caught her arm. They had reached the gate. The Spanish sentry was less offensive than was his wont. They passed through and were soon trailing out along the road.

Suddenly weary, she told herself that the thrill had gone from adventure. Something was wrong.

She had no time to think what, for down upon them dashed a horseman from the hill to their left. Abd-el-Krid's scouts were watching the road. Did not the heads of the two messengers adorn the wall? Even while a thrill akin to fear ran through her, she was critical of his horsemanship, for his robe had swept his face and had given her time to snatch the bundle of bread from her neighbour, overladen with a child upon her back. And so, bent beneath a burden, she passed with the others on her way. The horseman with a yell turned from the road and charged again up the steep, where he came to a halt on a rise of ground in the shadow once more to reconnoitre the long road.

One by one the peasants left her, climbing to high-perched villages, until she was alone.

She returned to her thoughts. Love, if this was that, made one weak. When had she ever dared danger with a fear? To-night she owned to it. Deep down she was afraid, afraid of death, afraid, rather, of missing life, Leslie and Leslie's love. Now she wished passionately that she had kissed him, had let him kiss her. At least she would have had that. But, then, she could never have left him. She recalled the effort with which she had torn herself from his arms. It was the hardest thing she had ever done — much harder than this night's work. To risk her life to save the garrisons was no

more than many such an adventure in the past — or hardly more —

And after to-night? A delicious languor stole over her. Should she leave it all to him — when she got back?

Once more the old rebellious spirit surged up. Lose her liberty?

Be his? Belong to him? Never. Free she would live and free she would die, but marry him or any other man — no. Yet while she said the words aloud to herself, she knew that deeper than anything was the certainty that she would be whatever Leslie Stewart asked her to be.

She looked about her. It was still a long way to the valley where she and Leslie had stood in the motor while the troops marched by. Abdullah would be waiting there with Scimitar, as she had bidden him. She would mount and be off down the long road to Fez. Filled with that dramatic sense which stage-set her every action, she saw herself speeding through the night, saw the tired columns overtaken, saw Tino himself turn to meet her, gave her message, even started other messengers onward to recall still farther-tramping battalions, turned with the regiment and by a forced march was back before the walls of El Foukara. Would Leslie understand?

Then, suddenly, she thought of her father. Was

Leslie like him or was it only the likeness of race? Both so tall and so big, with the cool air of command that she liked. She smiled in the darkness. How her father had spoiled her! She remembered her birthdays, each marked by some wonderful surprise up to that very last year, when he had led her out into the palace courtyard to find Scimitar with the gorgeous saddle of red morocco and the jewelled bridle. She had ridden like a princess at his side. A wave of homesickness swept over her for the hills and the waters of Fez. Surely no place in the world was as beautiful. From the white fore-court where the black guard waited, they would ride out through the archway and with the sound of the living water in their ears, a running accompaniment on their way, they would thread the narrow streets, by the mosaic fountains, by the walled gardens, by painted mosque and square, out by the gate onto the circling hills — hills that her father said were to him like the hills of Greece — capped by ruined towers, by ruined temples, where aloe and olive grew grey on the heights and fig and bamboo and the rose of almond filled the river-bottom and Fez, itself, climbed the hill again, a city of enchantment. Along the crest of the hill you went, following downstream, always with Fez rising beyond the river-bed and far below you crossed on that bridge of many arches and

came up the other ridge, always with your city of enchantment across the river. And as they rode there in May, every flower of the world seemed springing beneath your horse's feet and her father talked of England. He did not often speak of England. But in the spring the flowers made him think of his West country and he told her of the bluebells in the beech woods and of the banks of primroses. She wondered — was Leslie from the West country?

And then she thought with a fury of hurt pride of her one visit to England. How lost she had been with the Señora in that big hotel. It was too late for bluebells or for primroses. There had been horribly prim old aunts at Richmond. The King had sent for her. He had been kind and so had the Queen. They had given her tea in a quite unregal room in the palace and had talked to her about her father. Then people, great people, had left cards and invitations. She wondered now a little as she walked through the night why she had hated them all so much. Was it the fault of the Señora always at her elbow, constantly criticising, always carping?

In Madrid, it had been very different. There they had treated her like a true princess. They had all tried to marry her. They had courted and flattered her.

She shrugged. It seemed rather clear to her now. And then she had tired of that and had dragged the rebellious Señora back to Morocco, filled with the spirit of Spanish propaganda which had been so cleverly instilled in the ball-rooms of the capital. Well, she would finish it up, round it off with to-night's ride and then be free — to be anything — even English if she chose.

She was nearing the valley. Her whistle rang out softly clear and true and was answered off to the right and ahead. In a moment, Abdullah came into the dim road before her leading the horse. She greeted him gravely. She drew from her finger the ring of silver set with emeralds.

With the ring she gave the man the password for the Spanish sentries and a message for D'As-torga which she knew that Abdullah would deliver safely within the walls of El Foukara.

Then while he knelt to hold her stirrup, she vaulted into the saddle and in her white *haik* like a young hill sheik, was off down the road to Fez.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE history of that night was never written. You saw no account of it in the papers. They were too full of more important battles, more important matters. What was a corner of Spanish Morocco while the H. E.'s thundered in Flanders and every hour's despatches brought further dismay to the closed rooms in Whitehall? One or two old men in the Foreign Office turning up Fitzgerald's letters in the files may have wondered what was happening. Lord Bolton may have given it a passing thought. His only son was lying wounded in France. Yet in El Foukara, the fate of France in Morocco, of Spain in Morocco, hung in the balance. Perhaps the only two who fully realised it were the girl speeding south and Fitzgerald wrapped in his cloak moving through the streets from point to point. Concha Nicholson was risking her life for the cause of Spain. Fitzgerald held his light if by its loss he could win freedom for the Moor.

And at Spanish Headquarters, General Miguel sat in his bedroom, rage alone stiffening him from a total collapse. The appointee of a corrupt autocracy faced by the unexpected, he was futile. He shouted orders which he as quickly countered.

His aides were powerless. He broke off from the question of the moment to curse the political influence which had boosted him where he was. Indifferent to the opinion of those about him, he cynically exposed his own soul, in all its mean ambition and sordid greed.

'They told me that El Foukara was safe. That I should see no fighting. I didn't come to fight. I am not a fighting man. Do I look like a fighting man? It's all the fault of my nephew, the Councillor. He sent me here. I'll give him a piece of my mind. A nice post this. My own sister's son!'

D'Astorga stood by the window looking down into the lighted barrack yard, trying to shut out the sound of the man's words. He was sick at heart. Brave and upright he had no sympathy with the Moroccan campaign. But he was here like many another, to do his duty.

While the General's words were in his ears, the thought of Concha filled his mind. When he had missed her after their flight from the café, he had gone back to find her, but the café was deserted, empty save for the body of young Cortés. Again he had left by the rear door, to return yet again with his orderly for the body of the boy. As he thought of her now he was bitter, anxious and ashamed. They had all flattered her, amused her, admired her. They had trusted her and used her.

used her fortune, her spirit, her unequalled knowledge of the country, to this end. The General's only remark had been with a shrug, that she was half English and when all was said and done—a spy.

The only comfort he had was the belief that she could look out for herself. He prayed that she might.

His thoughts were disturbed by a fresh outburst from the General sitting coatless at the table. D'Astorga turned. An orderly stood before him, a man whom he had sent to the kaïd with an insolently worded demand for the surrender of Hassan Ali to trial and punishment.

'Refuses to give him up, you say?' A string of oaths followed. 'Refuses to give him up?'

The man tried vainly to speak, stopped by a torrent of words. Finally in a pause he managed to be heard. 'The kaïd did not refuse, sir. He tore up the letter, sir, unread.'

For a moment the General was speechless. Then he called down every form of vengeance upon the city, its men, women, and children. He painted a lurid picture of the revenge that he would take for this insult to himself.

The messenger stood patiently waiting. The staff, at last, looked their thorough disgust. But it was D'Astorga who stepped forward, speaking in a coldly measured tone.

'Before you can take your revenge, sir, the coming insurrection has to be dealt with, must be faced. No measures have as yet been taken, no orders given. I beg you, sir, to allow your staff to deal with this crisis, which, as you say, sir, your training has possibly not prepared you to meet. A sally, prompt action, is all that will save us. I take the responsibility for my words. I volunteer to lead a sortie myself.'

'No measures,' the General roared. 'How dare you, sir. Have I not sent two messengers, at your advice, the girl's advice, to recall the troops?'

'Too late.'

'Demanded the surrender of the rebel leader?'

'Your messengers — their heads adorn the city walls. The *kaid* insults our country, our flag, our King, destroys unread your letter.'

The General slumped down in his chair. He shrivelled. 'Take command,' he said weakly. 'Under me, of course. Act as you fellows think best. And, for God's sake, get out of here.'

At that instant an orderly appeared.

'What is it?' D'Astorga's tone was crisp.

'A Moor, sir, with a message for you.'

D'Astorga followed the orderly into the ante-room. Abdullah stood between two soldiers outside in the passage, repeating his name.

'Bring him in,' he said. He used his few words

of Arabic to give the poor fellow confidence. Abdullah produced the ring which he proffered. D'Astorga recognised it and slipped it upon his finger. Abdullah repeated his message very slowly in Arabic. 'Your messengers have failed. I go to recall the regiments. Make no sortie. Hold the garrisons to the last man, for succour is coming with the dawn. I send this by Abdullah, my servant.'

D'Astorga turned away and stood for a moment in silence. Then he beckoned Abdullah to follow him. He knocked upon the bedroom door and entered. 'My General,' he said, 'gentlemen — I have a message of the utmost importance to communicate. You know this ring?' He drew the silver circlet set with emeralds from his little finger.

The General grunted. 'What's happened to the girl?'

D'Astorga fixed him with a stern eye. 'The girl — the spy — has gone out alone upon the road to Fez, by night, running what risk you know, to recall the regiments.'

'What, sir?' The General half rose from his chair. 'The little devil.'

'Abdullah,' D'Astorga beckoned in the peasant. 'Repeat again the message of the honourable lady.'

Abdullah stood forward, his brown face, beneath his turban, taut with the effort to remember every word. 'I go to recall the regiments. Make no sortie. Hold the garrisons to the last man. Help comes with the dawn. I send this by Abdullah, my servant.'

'You may retire, my man. Wait for me in the ante-room.'

D'Astorga turned to the little group of men. 'We must have the grace to acknowledge that this is a great deed. Worthy to be numbered with the greatest in our history.' He bowed and went out.

The General grunted. 'The little devil,' he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LIFTED above the labyrinth of streets, of alleys and bazaars which were El Foukara, beneath the doming sky star-spangled, encircled by the stillness of the hills, a strange and phantom city had its life that night. The women were on the rooftops. From end to end of the pale town, the roofs stirred with the life of the harems, the shuffle of embroidered shoes, the rustle of brocaded kaftans, the soft trail of *haik*, of silk and gauze, the tiny clash of crystal bangles, of silver anklets, the smothered laugh, the snatch of song, the cry of a child. Like a sigh from the city came the first breath of their presence — voices, movements — a sigh which grew in import, as from roof to roof the wind carried hints of vengeance waiting to-night upon the hated Spaniard, carried, too, old stories of past glories, of ancient wrongs, of deeds of valour. Then the sigh swelled to a voice and the voice bearing its weight of woe trembled out from every housetop over the town, gaining as the hours passed, ever a deadlier meaning, a more cruel note till the waiting men upon the hilltops, stirred to the depths of their beings by the immemorial cry, started down to the plains below.

The women on the housetops were keening for the fight.

Mahommed Ali's women had passed up the narrow staircase to the roof. The wives muffled to the eyes as they crossed the corner of the patio, content at any change in the monotony of their cramped existences, the slaves, whose freedom was greater than their mistresses, excited and amused, the children, the wise women who kept them all in order, one by one they had trailed up the stair to the roof, there to settle themselves, to listen, to apprehend all that the wind whispered and in their turn to give it abroad to the night, rocking as they raised their voices.

Fitzgerald changing into native garments in his rooms heard the long-drawn cry rising from above him and knew that he must return as he had come, by the street. It would not do to surprise Mahommed Ali's wives unveiled. So he tramped down the stairs and through the passage to the door. He felt in the door for the key. It eluded him. He snapped on his electric torch and looked. The key was gone, neither in the door nor on the ground. He could not believe his own senses. Not fifteen minutes ago, he had entered here and locked the door after him with care. What did it mean? Only one thing in the domain of material things, that some one had taken the

key, that some one unknown to him had been in the house with him. Was that some one still in the house? He examined the keyhole. No, the key was in the lock on the outside.

He made his way to the court. It was damned unpleasant, damned awkward. He would be obliged to return to Mahommed Ali's over the roof after all. He went up the stair to his own roof, where he raised his voice in a shout, 'Yaminah, Yaminah —

The slave heard his appeal and came jumping down, running towards him. He begged her to explain to the ladies that he was obliged to pass that way and to ask if they would pardon his intrusion.

Yaminah ran with the message and in a moment a chorus of jesting voices bid him be free of the housetop. In a moment he had climbed the few steps of the ladder and was the centre of a lively group of children and slaves, while the wives of their master sat veiled and nodding to him from the parapet behind them. Freeing himself from the dancing crowd, last of all from the little 'un in green who clung to his leg, Fitzgerald started down the stair. He suddenly stopped, struck by a thought. Where was Concha? He turned and addressed himself to Yaminah.

'And where is the lady who is the guest of the harem?'

The girl looked at him in amazement. 'But the lady left the harem an hour after sunset. Since then we have not seen her. No more does your servant know.'

'Left, left, where did she go?'

The girl shrugged, pouting. 'How should your servant know the ways of the white women?'

But already Fitzgerald was at the bottom of the stairs, where in the patio, he sent a 'guard to ask the English Excellency to speak with him.

The man returned at once followed by Leslie.

'Look here, Stewart, Miss Nicholson isn't in the women's apartments. That means she is not in the house. Have you seen her?'

'Yes, I have,' Leslie answered somewhat curtly. 'She asked me to meet her on the roof — an hour ago. I did so.'

'And then — did you come down together?'

'No, I left her there.'

'Ah, then it was over the roof and through my house that she left, locking the street door after her.' He told Leslie of his late experience.

'Where has she gone?' Leslie exclaimed blankly.

'Back to her Spanish friends at H.Q., I presume, with all the information that we have given her. I will wager that the first result will be an attack upon this house.'

'You're mad,' Leslie cried. 'Wherever she has gone or whatever she is doing, you can trust Miss Nicholson to play the game.'

'But what the devil —'

'I don't know. I will tell you this — she had something on her mind. She asked me to promise to trust her, however much appearances were against her. And I shall.'

'You're in love,' Fitzgerald said wearily. 'And so is she. Which means that the pair of you are no use to any one, worse luck.'

'I beg your pardon,' Leslie began stiffly, but he was not proof against the charm of Fitzgerald's instant smile, as taking the younger man's arm, he said, 'Pay no attention to me. It's sore I am. I'd give my head to be your age again. In love? Ye gods! Lucky fellow that ye are. No, no, I am only annoyed because I am troubled. You don't think I ought to wear this dress. You say you think as Consul, I ought to keep out of things — sit back, egg 'em on and do nothing. Well, that I can't do and I won't. They are white, these Moors, and I am going to fight with my friends, Consul or no Consul. Wartime it is, my dear Stewart, and who's going to be after caring what is done this night in El Foukara?'

'By God, I'm with you. I can't sit about doing nothing with this going on.'

'No, no, it's different for you, m'boy — not your fight.'

'We're in this together,' Leslie declared stubbornly. 'Give me a jellab, anything, to put over these clothes.'

'All right, all right. But you've now got to take orders from me. You stop here. You've got to guard this house. This is the centre for us all. Mahommed Ali is nominally the head, but you must keep him straight. El Mahdi, Hassan Ali, Abdhur Rahman, they will all report here. You've got your work cut out.'

'And you?'

'I've got mine. So that's that. I'm off. I know you're worried, old son, but you are doing the right thing. I'll let you know at once if I get any news of her. She's safer than most of us. So long.'

Sore at his own enforced inaction, Leslie returned to join Mahommed Ali.

CHAPTER XXIX

MAHOMMED ALI sat in the room of fine proportions that opened from the patio. Craftsmen from Fez had wrought the exquisite plaster-work of dome and arch and frieze, had coloured the plaster in a rich and intricate design, had carved the noble doors of cedar wood and laid in the patina of gold, of blue, of orange, of green and vermillion. From the looms of Marrakech had come the fine silken arabesques of the wall hangings, and Rabat and Meknes had sent the carpets. Yet he sat on a cane-bottomed chair at a walnut extension table, lighted by a standard lamp bought from a catalogue of the stores and cheap gilt-framed mirrors from Marseilles, a number of clocks of varying sizes and shapes and a large gramophone in a rose-wood case, gave the usual incongruous note to the apartment.

The Moor had the Eastern power of concentration, of withdrawal within himself, which Leslie had learned to know. Mahommed Ali, with the fortunes of his house hanging upon the outcome of this night, had the serene look that he might have worn at any evening's game of draughts in his favourite café. Had he thoughts? Had he

anxieties? No trace of them appeared in his untroubled countenance.

From time to time his thin brown hand stroked his white beard or touched the papers on the table before him, which bore lists of the names of those in each section of the town who had pledged themselves to the rebellion, lists of those receiving arms, and other memoranda. There was an inkpot of Rouen ware, quill pens and a small locked coffer which held the party funds. At his elbow stood the tall brass kettle-stand and a smaller table bore the tea-equipage for the endless mint tea.

His calmly sedate figure was in sharp contrast to the stream of hurried figures, messengers and such, who were constantly passing back and forth, asking for arms, requiring information, bringing messages.

Leslie seated opposite Mahommed Ali was occupied with the questions that filled his own mind. Where was Concha? Where was Fitzgerald? What was happening? Would the Spaniards make a sortie? But the words of an excited Arab boy in a short garment, with a forgotten flower still stuck behind an ear under the fez, fixed his attention.

‘From El Mahdi. Signal fires from the Riff. Abd-el-Krid prepares to descend. This is many hours before the time arranged. El Mahdi asks

for instructions.' Leslie consulted his watch. It was just ten o'clock.

Mahommed Ali had turned his grave face to Leslie, when a second messenger appeared breathless.

'The Son of the King has seen the signal fires. He is in position. He attacks without delay.' The youth bowed, but as he turned away, he burst into a flood of words. 'The Son of the King is like a mighty army. He has no fear. He shall sweep all before him. And the little gun! The little talking gun!' He clapped his hands and vanished.

The young Arab was eagerly waiting. 'Surely,' Leslie said, 'El Mahdi should attack on the west to support Fitzgerald on the south!'

'Surely,' echoed the placid voice. The Arab lad was off.

'The Son of the King has taken for himself the place of greatest danger,' the Moor said placidly. 'He is as brave as a lion in the mountain. He is my friend. And friendship between the East and the West, ah, that is difficult.'

'Is there not a saying that it is possible only when the charcoal takes root and the salt buds, O Mahommed Ali?'

The Moor smiled. 'And yet he is, indeed, my friend,' he repeated. He remembered that day in spring when as they sat by the fountain listening

to the singing birds, he had called his eldest son — now safe in Fez — and had bidden him place in Fitzgerald's hands the silver casket. The boy had opened it with the silver key which Mahommed Ali felt now at his girdle. And from the casket he had lifted the eight hundred years' old deed to a property in Granada and the great key.

Mahommed Ali nodded slowly at the memory. He had spread the parchment upon his knee with an offering gesture to Fitzgerald, the great key he had hugged to himself in one thin brown hand. And Fitzgerald had laid his hand upon the parchment and had described to them that palace in Granada, the gardens, the vineyards, the paradise, which on a day they had lost.

The deed to that unforgotten domain, the key turned in haste and the hope of return, had lain in that silver casket for centuries, the household treasure of these Moors in El Foukara. Yes, Mahommed Ali loved the Son of the King for the manner in which he had held and turned that heavy, finely wrought key in his great hands, had placed it again in the casket and had then risen and gone out, saying nothing. That sacred heirloom, to one less beloved had it ever been disclosed. He sighed, regretting his years. Fitzgerald, to-night, was fighting for his friend.

As the evening wore on, the keening of the

women grew fainter as the crack of rifle-fire, the ripping of an occasional machine gun increased.

Leslie, bound to the table by Mahommed Ali's side, felt the strain to be almost unendurable. Chits from Fitzgerald, messengers from the Moorish leaders, were constantly arriving. If only he had been assured of Concha's safety, he could have laughed at the amazing manner in which Fitzgerald's plans were working out. As report after report came in, it seemed to him most probable that when the morrow came and daylight lent its courage to the timorous, the whole of El Foukara would be in arms and every Spaniard dead. Then the regiments, recalled too late, would fall a prey to the hill-tribes and Fitzgerald would, indeed, see the dawn of Moorish independence.

There seemed to be no hitch anywhere, El Mahdi at the West, Abd-el-Krid at the East, all was going well. Twice Fitzgerald, with his small band had swept down the mongrel street of shops, through the square to the very gate of the barracks. Twice he had been repulsed with loss to the Spaniards.

'Saw the fat General shot by one of his own men,' ended the scribbled lines. 'A Spanish prisoner assures me that she is not there. Probably safe with native friends.'

Relieved of his worst anxiety, Leslie turned to congratulate Mahommed Ali on the success of the enterprise, but the Moor did not respond. Leslie remembered, too late, that misfortune attends upon the receiver of compliments.

CHAPTER XXX

By one o'clock that night Fitzgerald with his men had for the third time swept down the little street of shops, had dashed forward across the Place de l'Espagne, under rifle-fire from the windows of the hotel, and had finally succeeded in throwing up a barricade in the street opposite the barracks and commanding the sortie. Fitzgerald, himself, his jellab half off, directed his men. Tall and spare, his face grimed with sweat and dust, his figure taut with energy, not only fearless, but enjoying danger, he was a marked man. In the two attacks already repulsed by the Spaniards with loss, it was Fitzgerald who had drawn their fire. D'Astorga had pointed him out as the leader: 'The tall Moor in the flying jellab, with the face of a fanatic, get him if you can.' Thus far they had failed.

Now, at last, the longed-for message had come from Leslie. 'Abd-el-Krid successful at the East, El Mahdi fighting fiercely at the West, only a question of moments there.' As Fitzgerald read the words, crouching by the light of a match, a flush of triumph coloured his face beneath the grime. He was silent in the moment of his exultation. But oaths met the following sentence:

'Can't stick this. Mahommed Ali can carry on. Coming.'

Before he had finished his slow remarks a hand fell on his shoulder, and he turned to find Leslie himself. He blazed out for a moment.

'What the ruddy hell are you doing here? Get down, man, get down,' as a volley of rifle-fire came rattling down the street. Fitzgerald turned fiercely to his men. 'Keep your heads down. You drew that.' To Leslie: 'They are not coming out. We've got to attack.'

'Not yet,' Leslie cried quickly. 'As I left, just after I had sent that message, one came in from Abd-el-Krid. The Anjeri are in it now. They are coming through the south gate to your assistance.'

Fitzgerald gasped: 'I've got 'em all with me, the town, the Riff, the Anjera. Every man jack of 'em. By Saint—— it's a day to live for. The Anjera!'

There was a pause. 'They don't seem to be very active,' Leslie said.

'Yes, it's pretty quiet now, but it was blue hell half an hour ago, and it will be again. They are holding their fire till we attack.'

As they looked a burst of flame lit up the street.

'Holy Moses! The barracks on fire!'

At that instant from the street off to the left of them, from the direction of the south gate, came a wild yell and the swift rush of horses' hoofs.

'The Anjeri!' cried Fitzgerald, springing to his feet, forgetful of all but the glory of the moment, as into view at the foot of their street, lit up by the light from the barracks, came charging a body of horsemen with all their native fire. They wheeled before the very gates of the enemy, and came tearing down upon the barricade which they leapt, scattering the men to right and left, and the first horse over was Scimitar.

In a flash, amazed, Leslie had recognised horse and rider. The band thundered down the street.

Fitzgerald quickly reposted his men to hold the position, and strode back to the little square where the horsemen had halted. In the starlight the horses, the white-robed riders, made for a moment a still group blurred against the grey walls. As he approached he saw a slim figure slip off a horse into Leslie's waiting arms.

Concha freed herself at once, turning to the Anjera chief, 'Have I not spoken truly? This is the "Son of the King," the English Excellency, with whom I would speak. May I?' She turned to Fitzgerald. 'One moment, please, alone?'

Together they stepped aside into the depths of an archway. Her hands were straining together, her voice was broken and low.

'They met me outside the gate. They brought me in. I have been a long way . . . I am tired

. . . But I had to come back . . . to warn you. The regiment . . .' she paused with an indrawn breath, 'all the regiments are recalled.' Fitzgerald stood rigid, silent. 'I did it. The regiment will be here before sunrise. I had to . . . I had to . . . But now, can't you stop the fighting? Cannot something be done to stop it?' She caught his arm in anguish, pierced by his silence. 'I am sorry . . . I cannot explain . . . Do stop it! The Spaniards are coming back.'

Fitzgerald looked down on her from his height with curious eyes, as if he did not see her. Then he shook himself together.

'Good,' he said shortly. 'Thank you, Miss Nicholson. You don't lack courage.'

They turned back to the square as a renewed burst of rifle-fire rattled down the street. The horsemen had dismounted. Every man carried a long thin gun. They looked to Fitzgerald. He hesitated. With this information had he a right to sacrifice any further lives? But the fighting fever was on him. He saw it in the eyes of these hillmen. He swept an arm around to Leslie.

'Take this lady, take Miss Nicholson back to the house of Mahommed Ali. Yes, I shall follow shortly. Go now. Go!'

'But . . .'

‘Take your orders, my boy. Miss Nicholson, go with him, please.’

Without waiting to see them disappear, he turned a reckless face to the Anjera leader.

‘We attack,’ he said. ‘I give you your orders. We shall attack.’

CHAPTER XXXI

FITZGERALD had carried the attack to the gate of the barracks. He had given his men a definite objective, the capture of the machine guns on the wall, to the right inside the gates. He carried his men through with him in a rush. Just within the yard they were met by a hail of bullets, but nothing could stop their mad, triumphant advance. The Moors were sure of victory; everywhere they knew of their successes. El Foukara was theirs again. They swept up the incline in the face of the fire, and bore down upon the Spaniards with resistless impetus. The fight became a *mêlée*, a hand-to-hand encounter, filling the whole space of the yard with struggling, battling figures, while Fitzgerald, with his picked band, shadowed by faithful Sadi, flung themselves upon the machine-gun crews. Sadi's face was shining as knifing the man serving the first gun, he turned to Fitzgerald. 'The little talking-gun,' he shouted.

'We take it,' Fitzgerald ordered.

At that moment the Anjera hillmen with their fierce war-cry swept in at the gate, and in the confusion no one noticed Sadi and his little band of

Arabs slipping forth, down a side street, bearing the machine gun between them.

Fitzgerald, looking down upon the furious fighting that raged in the yard, was suddenly possessed by its futility. There was too much to do, too much to arrange, to waste time here. He had been mad. This news had changed everything, had changed life for him. The garrison had known. They had fought like men with hope. They had known that help was on the way. The moment had come to withdraw. The Anjeri, the Riffi, the townsmen who had rushed so gloriously towards their freedom, once more they must withdraw, withdraw. . . . To return some day. His place was with Mahommed Ali.

Sadi, back at his side, plunged into the *mêlée* with orders to the native leaders.

A few moments later Fitzgerald stood between Mahommed Ali and Leslie in that room of fine proportions, out of the patio. On the edge of the long divan by the wall Concha Nicholson sat, her head in her hands.

Fitzgerald touched Mahommed Ali's shoulder. 'My friend,' he said, 'we have much to settle.'

At the sound of his voice Mahommed Ali looked up, questioning.

'But first you will pardon me if I speak my own tongue?'

Leslie followed him into the patio.

'She has not spoken to me since we left you,' Leslie said.

'Then you don't know?'

'What?'

'The game is up, my son. The regiments are recalled. Unless the Riffi hold them outside the gates. No, the game is up. El Foukara is . . . still Spanish . . . for the moment. We've been playing a fool's game. We must get out of these clothes. After all, as you said, I am Consul here, I am British Consul, though I am Irish. Now, take Miss Nicholson at once to the Consulate; I'll join you soon. We must not be found here. And neither of us, you understand, has anything to do with this night's work. Go on now.'

Leslie hesitated, amazed at his words.

'For God's sake, Stewart, take her and clear off! I've much to do. Here's the key.' He pressed it in Leslie's hand.

Together they returned to the room. Concha had not moved. It was Fitzgerald who spoke to her.

'Miss Nicholson, I am asking Stewart to take you next door, to the Consulate, if you don't mind.'

She looked up at him. 'But I am not British,' she said.

He dropped a hand on her shoulder. 'I don't know what you think you are. I know that you are a brave woman, and a tired one at that. Go now. Good-bye, and good luck . . . to both of you.'

'But you are coming,' Leslie demurred.

'In a bit. In a bit. Good-bye.'

Concha rose. 'You are very kind,' she said with a prim, foreign intonation, and she followed Leslie.

Fitzgerald sat down at the table.

'Now, my friend, we must be calm. We have not too much time. The Spanish regiments are returning.'

Mahommed Ali turned ashen pale.

'This house is known. You must move your women and children' . . . oh, that little 'un in green! . . . 'at once as quietly as possible. Divide them amongst your family houses. This is your own business, Mahommed Ali. You have your secret exits by which they may leave. I shall guard your house till every one of them is safe.' He tapped Mahommed Ali on the shoulder gently. 'Trust me.'

Mahommed Ali's colour slowly returned.

'Start them off now. Give orders to the guard. Let no one enter. I go now to Abd-el-Krid, to El Mahdi. There is just a hope that they may cut

off the regiments as they return. But all that is for the soldiers, my friend. You will destroy all papers; bury your treasure. I need not tell you. But you have *first* the safety of your family to assure.'

'And you, Son of the King?'

'*Mah-sha-Allah*,' Fitzgerald returned smiling.

The two men with grave faces kissed each other, Moorish fashion, on the cheek.

CHAPTER XXXII

It was some hours later. Concha slept. Unwillingly, protesting that she would not with the sound of firing coming ever nearer, she had yet succumbed to her utter weariness. Leslie, covering her with a rug from Fitzgerald's room, was filled with a great tenderness for her. Only in sleep had she abandoned her pride, her puzzling aloofness. How much longer would she keep it up? He believed that she loved him. Then why not accept his love and be happy? Every day was precious in these uncertain times.

He tucked the rug under her feet. It was bitterly cold at this hour before the dawn. He would go and forage, find the spirit-lamp, and make some coffee, have it ready when she woke up; have some ready for old Fitz when he came in.

He was uneasy about Fitzgerald. Why did he not come? What was he doing now? Awfully difficult position for him; such friends with old Mahommed Ali and all the household. Did not do to mix up like that with the natives anywhere. Could not see things straight if you did. But he liked Fitzgerald, good old sort. Irish as they make 'em.

He found the lamp and lighted it. Found coffee too, and the coffee-pot still full of grounds. He washed it and refilled it. Found cups and sugar. Fussed about a little Moorish table, arranged it all neatly, three cups, one for Concha, one for Fitz, and one for himself.

Well, it was a satisfaction to know that the Germans were balked again, that French Morocco was relieved of its menace. The deuce of it was that he'd get the credit, when he had done little; Concha and Fitzgerald. Poor old Fitz.

The coffee was hot. He blew out the flame. He could heat it again. Concha slept and Fitzgerald was not back. What could have become of him? The firing was becoming much heavier. Artillery. And now came the scream of a shell and the distant explosion and crash of falling masonry. Leslie's forehead was damp. It was rather beastly to be shut up in the middle of a town with that going on all around you, and not to know what was happening. He looked down at the girl with anxiety. Ought he to waken her? What earthly use? They could do nothing but await events.

The moments passed, each a year to Leslie's strained attention. The shelling continued. Explosion after explosion, and the roar of the guns. The sky above the patio reflected the flames of burning buildings. He stood helpless, the coffee-

pot in his hand. Now the artillery-fire had ceased, and he once more heard the ripping of machine-guns, the crack of rifles. He strained his ears to locate the sounds. For the first time the alarms were near, in the street! He heard now the firing outside his very door, and then, suddenly, the ripping fire of a machine-gun seemed to come from the roof above him. Concha stirred, sat up.

Who was above there? Who was without? Was some one coming over the roof? Setting down the precious coffee with great care Leslie crossed to the stairs, his automatic in his hand. As he mounted, the spiteful clip of the machine-gun was close above him; the answering volleys of rifle-fire in the street outside. He opened the door and looked out, expecting he knew not what; but the roof of the Consulate was empty. He stood upright, and there on the roof adjoining was a figure. Was it friend or foe? And as he asked the question he almost laughed to recognise Fitzgerald in that wild figure in the flying jellab. What in Heaven's name was he doing there on the parapet, with that machine-gun?

‘Fitzgerald!’ he shouted. ‘Oh, Fitzgerald!’

At the sound of his voice Fitzgerald half turned, and then slowly fell backward onto the roof from the parapet, a bullet through his side.

There was a shout of triumph from below.

Spanish oaths. They were battering now on Mahommed Ali's great door.

Leslie was up the ladder; had his arms around Fitzgerald. He must be quick, yet cautious. No blood must show the way that he had passed. Fitz was still breathing. Leslie wrapped the jellab around his chest, then lifted him down the ladder, across the roof, down the stairs. Concha stood rigid at the foot.

'Fasten the roof-door above; then this door,' Leslie gasped as he passed her. He reached the first room where Concha had been sleeping, but he went on into Fitzgerald's own bedroom, and in the midst of the disorder laid him on his bed.

Then quickly to get off the jellab, which all the night long had flown like a banner of woe to the Spaniard, to hide it. To staunch the blood, to wash the grimed face, to comb the wild, disordered hair. Concha was at his side now, self-contained and cool, but her eyes, large and sad, looked a question. Leslie shook his head.

Fitzgerald moved, opened his eyes which found Leslie's. 'Ah,' he panted. 'Held . . . 'em . . . off . . . for a bit. That little 'un in green, you know . . . safe. . . .' His eyes were full of a supreme satisfaction. His lips twitched in his old humorous smile. 'And that's that,' he said. Then he turned over, and with a sigh which brought the

red blood to his lips, he died. For the first time the Consul lay rigid and British upon his bed.

There were sounds on the roof above; men moving. The two waited, still and tense. The sounds above died away. Then, suddenly, there came a loud rapping upon the street-door, which galvanized them again to life.

Concha started towards the stairs. 'I shall answer,' she said. They went down the stairs together, across the court, through the passage to the door.

'Who's there?' Her voice showed not a tremor.

'God be praised, Señorita! Is that you? It's D'Astorga.'

She waved Leslie away. 'Back, upstairs.'

She unbarred, unlocked the door. 'D'Astorga!'

D'Astorga bowed. 'We have searched for you everywhere. I did not expect to find you . . . here.' His emphasis was unmistakable.

'In the house of the British Consul? Alas, D'Astorga, he who was Consul, who was a friend of my father's, a friend of mine, lies dead — shot in the street, not an hour since. The American who sells the machines, who brought me in his car, is with him. Never shall I forget their kindness to me this night.' She led him in, across the patio as she talked. He had halted his soldiers in the passage.

'When I reached the town the fight was raging around headquarters. I did not know where to go, so I came here, and they have given me food and rest and kindness. And now he is dead.'

Very real tears were in her eyes as she led D'Astorga up the stairs and along the balcony.

'Mr. Stewart,' she said quietly. 'This is Major . . .'

'General.'

'General D'Astorga, of whom I have spoken.' The two men bowed.

'The British Consul,' she motioned to the room, 'lies there.'

'You permit me?' D'Astorga approached the bed with uncovered head and stood confused, astonished, looking from the still face to Leslie and back again. He shrugged slightly as he left the room. Leslie noiselessly closed the great doors.

Concha had relighted the spirit-lamp. 'You shall have coffee, D'Astorga, in a moment,' she said.

D'Astorga was deeply moved. He stood stiffly regarding her, his fine face white.

'Ah, Señorita, what can I say? There are no words in which I can express the gratitude, the admiration, of myself, of the garrison, the army, for your courage . . . your . . .'

Concha leant towards him, her hand raised, her face as white and moved as his own.

‘Don’t please, if you are really my friend. It was nothing. Things that are easy for some people are hard for me. Things that take courage like that . . . are easy. *Voilà!*’

She turned away to pour the coffee into the three little cups. They drank in silence the hot and heartening draught.

D’Astorga rose. ‘My men are below. It is strange. We had information; we hoped to surprise Mahommed Ali, the leader in this rebellion, in his house next door. We met with no resistance; no one in the streets till we got there. Then fire opened upon us from a machine-gun on his roof. We looked up, and there was the same wild man who led three charges against headquarters in the night. He held us up, killed several of my men before we got him. We saw him fall! Yet, when we finally got into the house — those oak doors are strong — we found it deserted. Not a soul in the place except Mahommed Ali himself who was lying dead in the patio, his pistol in his hand. Shot himself. When we got to the roof, not a vestige of the Moor!’

‘It must have been Mahommed Ali himself on the roof,’ Concha hazarded. But D’Astorga shook his head. He stood perplexed. He looked

from Concha in her boyish dress to Leslie and back again.

'I am in command,' he said slowly, 'until D'Alves arrives. It is, I think, advisable that Mr. Stewart should leave the town as soon as possible. There has been a rumour — quite wrong, I see —' he paused, bowing to them both, 'that the British Consul and his friend were implicated in this affair. International relations! . . . difficult — you see?'

'Quite,' said Leslie. 'I appreciate your consideration . . . but, I stay.'

D'Astorga's face hardened. 'Must I remind Mr. Stewart again that I am in command? On the contrary, sir, you go.'

Leslie bowed. There was silence. Concha did not move nor speak.

'The car that you came in, Mr. Stewart,' D'Astorga continued after a moment, 'is waiting at the bridge in the valley. The run from there to the coast is safe. You will be in Gibraltar to-night.'

'And here,' Leslie said. 'Here? I must know what arrangements are made here.'

D'Astorga bowed. 'I post a guard. All the effects of the late Consul shall be under seal until we receive orders from his Government. Trust me, Mr. Stewart, all shall be done decently and in

order. If I have insisted, you will understand, it is for your own good. Foreigners should not be in the town at this moment. The Duke will be in command within half an hour.'

Leslie stood stiffly acquiescent. He dared not look at Concha, who was so still, yet it was impossible to go without a word. He took a step towards her.

'Is it good-bye then, Miss Nicholson?' His tone was as indifferent as he could make it. 'You see — I am under orders —'

At the sound of his voice, the girl turned. Her face seemed suddenly very small and white. Her voice was controlled. Under D'Astorga's eye she smiled, holding out her hand.

'Yes, it is good-bye, Mr. Stewart. Oh! what was that?' She turned a startled face to D'Astorga. 'I am sure that I heard something —'

D'Astorga stepped forward, looking down into the patio. In that instant, Concha's lips moved framing the soundless words, 'Yes, go — you must go — for his sake you must go.' She nodded to the darkened room.

Leslie stepped forward as D'Astorga returned.

'I am ready,' he said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

‘RIGHT wheel!’ The Spanish sergeant gave the order sharply as Leslie, under escort, left the town by the very gate through which he and Fitzgerald had passed only yesterday. Out here the sound of desultory firing hardly disturbed the peace of the hillside beautiful in the light of early morning. There was that sense of virginal freshness over all the valley which the dawn reveals as a miracle to those weary of the night. Leslie, tired in body and sore of heart, received some refreshment breathed from the wide, dew-filled spaces, yet, as he started after the Spanish sergeant down the pale line of the path towards the bridge below, his thoughts were bitter.

He had lost his friend, he had lost his love. Fitzgerald had died as he had lived, fanatically devoted to an ideal. He had died despairing of its fulfilment, in a moment which had closely followed his highest hopes of success. Yet he had been just, even in his agony, to Concha Nicholson, had felt no resentment towards her. Leslie, his eyes on the back of the Spaniard before him, found himself vowing with fervour that Fitzgerald should not have died in vain. What were the

words that Abd-el-Krid had spoken? 'We fail to-day. To-morrow to us the victory.'

And Mahommed Ali. Had they met, he wondered, those two friends of alien race, in some free borderland where are loosed the narrow bands of earthly imposition, of creed, of race?

All other thoughts, however, were swallowed up in a great depression that descended upon him, bowing his shoulders, weighting his feet. He was filled with the sick consciousness that he was leaving Concha Nicholson, leaving her unbound, as free as when he had met her, leaving her, too, in the camp of the enemy. Yet could he have helped this? He re-lived the events of the night. Had he known how short his time with her was to be, he might have acted differently; he would have spoken, have forced her to listen, to answer him. But her weariness, her aloofness, he had respected and now —

Yet he could swear that she was not indifferent. She had understood his appeal — 'Is it good-bye?' and true to something outside herself, or within her, Nicholson's very spirit, she had answered him, 'For his sake, you must go.' Once that was said, with all that it implied, there had been no alternative. That must be his consolation now that he was here on his homeward road alone and she in El Foukara.

At the bridge he turned and looked back — as he had turned with Fitzgerald yesterday — but there was no wavering line of colour up the hill to-day. Yet the 'little 'un in green' was safe.

He turned brusquely to the Ford of many memories. To his annoyance he realised, as the sergeant addressed him, that his escort did not leave him here.

'Will the Señor conduct or —'

Leslie sprang into the driving seat, one man beside him and two in the car behind, and started on the road to the sea; a great road, a great high-road, the road that leads from Fez. Here were no flowered fields, no pale hills, no purple mountains, but the tang of the sea wind in the brown marshland, in the matted scrub, in twisted tree. Roads, roads, all the world over, what ways you have, what leadings, to the mind and the spirit of man. And this road, followed by the Roman legions, followed by the shadowy press of ancient peoples, Leslie was following now, eager as the first man was eager, to see what lay beyond. Yes, with Concha behind him, he yet looked ahead and saw — the sea! The thin glinting line of silver that to every Englishman means the pathway to home. And rising jaggedly off to the left and ahead, was Jebel Moussa which he had seen so

many years ago from the other side, as he drank his morning coffee on the hotel terrace.

Ah! that was the day that he had met her! In an instant, the road, the sea, the great Pillar of Hercules, all, were forgotten in the longing for a girl's face, for her voice, for the touch of her hand —

The little town now; the quay and a ship alongside. Sun, high now, pouring down on the dusty wharves, on the blue-black streaky wine-casks fresh from Spain, on the mongrel crowd lounging about the Moorish arches of the custom-house; sun which throws purple shadows. Leslie knew it all well.

He knew, too, the little steamship that plied in normal times from Algeciras to Tangier, narrow in the beam, her upper deck empty, her lower deck crowded with a strange assortment of humanity awaiting misery on the sea with apathetic certainty. Hardly conscious of how he got there, he found himself aboard the craft, in a trance of unhappiness, facing an omelette and a bottle of red wine on that empty upper deck. His actions had become automatic, his mind occupied only with the intolerable thought that he was in the grip of unalterable circumstance. Once he started to his feet, swept by the sudden fierce determination to see Concha again, at any cost. It was a

mad impulse which took him as far as the rail before the devastating truth returned, that the boat was sailing in a few moments' time and that his duty and his honour held him here. He returned and sank into his seat, his back to the deck house. Blankly his eyes rested upon the lounging groups upon the quay and his apathy was faintly quickened by their sudden interest in something that he could not see. They looked and pointed, some who were sitting rose to a better view — of what? A dog fight? A drunken brawl? Leslie groaned in weary loathing, when sharp and quick upon his ears came the clean hoof-beats of a galloping horse. Afraid to trust his senses, his intuition, he sat still, his hands clenched, his breath held in tense attention. Nearer, sharper, close now, whirling down the quay. He rose, not daring to look, standing tall and rigid, till a voice frantic with haste rang out his name.

‘Leslie!’

She was there, the wonderful, amazing child! Oblivious of all — the loungers on the dock, the crowd upon the lower deck, she swept straight to the ship-side and brought Scimitar to rest quivering, at the quay's edge. She was on the ground —

‘Quick,’ she cried, leaning forward, her hand

outstretched to meet his, 'they are drawing in the gangway.'

'You are coming?'

She shook her head, her eyes bright with tears which she dashed away. 'Gave my parole,' a little breathless laugh broke her words, 'or of course I'd come.' She threw up her head with the gallant lift that he knew. 'I came — to tell you. I am with you always — if you want me.'

The boat was slowly moving. He saw her go white, as her hand still in his, she followed along the quay.

'Listen, Concha,' he said. 'We've only a second. My own love, I want to say everything. But you know it all, don't you? That you are the bravest, most true, most beautiful — that I love you. You know it?'

'Yes — yes —'

'Whatever happens —'

'It won't —' she flashed.

'I shall come back.'

'And I shall wait —'

The siren blew an ear-splitting blast. The boat sheered slowly off. Their hands parted. The ship creakingly headed out to sea where the little waves sparkled and danced, but the figure on the quay was still. The ship gathered headway, but the figure remained motionless. Faster the ship

went, gathering speed, but to Leslie's eyes the figure of Concha remained straight and steadfast until she became one with the haze of the dim blue distance.

TANGIER, 1920.

CHANTEMESLE, 1925.

THE END

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The Peacocks' Tail



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